

Simmons

SIMMONS MAGAZINE | Celebrating 125 Years | simmons.edu/alumni



Simmons, 153 Lexington Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Translated from Lucille Loring Gillette 2;
Ellen Richards 2, 3, 4; Secretary-Treasurer 3;
Civ. Club 2; Outing 2;
Lab-coat — frog's best friend.

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NATALIE SALL
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Love
Pencil

GARRETT
Lynn
Bradford
Massachusetts

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125

YEARS
of SIMMONS

Founded for Equality.
Built for Now.

Pg. 20





FEATURES

20

**Founded for Equality.
Built for Now.**

For 125 years, Simmons has stayed true to its founding mission—preparing women to earn an independent livelihood—while steadily updating academic programs and offerings to meet the needs of students *now*. Simmons is built for learning, innovation, creativity, mentorship, social justice, leadership, knowledge, and giving back.

38

Through the Lens

We looked back at the past 125 years and pulled together the best images taken through the eyes and lenses of the Simmons University staff—highlighting learning, campus, student life, and our beloved mascot, Stormy the Shark.

ABOUT THE COVER



Celebrating 125 years of Simmons—“Founded for Equality, Built for Now.” See story, Pg. 20. **Illustration by Dana Smith.**

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◀ **The Class of 1906**, the first class to graduate from Simmons.

125 Years of Excellence

➔ As Simmons celebrates its 125th anniversary, which culminates with a very special Reunion this June, we reflect upon our original founding mission: using education to help women earn independent livelihoods. That belief has stayed at the core of who we are, and evolved into a commitment to provide an education that is inclusive, experiential, and rigorous and which allows our students to thrive in their professions and lives.

To celebrate this milestone, we turned to the Simmons University Archives—whose invaluable work is rich with stories and imagery of resilience, courage, and progress—to help us all reflect on where we've been, how far we've come, and the bright future ahead. The Simmons story could, of course, fill volumes. In this special edition of *Simmons Magazine*, we invite you to journey through time with a sampling of stories about people and moments that have helped define our community. They show how Simmons is indeed founded for equality, and built for now.

From black-and-white photographs of early classrooms, to students fighting for gender equity, to today's dynamic campus, the images and articles on the pages that follow tell a story of evolution—of students who challenged norms, faculty who inspired and supported learning, and a university that has continually adapted to meet the needs of the times.

As we honor our legacy, we also look forward. What will the next 125 years bring? How will Simmons continue to lead, innovate, and advance future generations? The answers lie not just in history, but in the vision we create today as a community of students, alumnae/i, faculty, staff, and friends.

Here's to Simmons' inspiring past, dynamic present, and limitless future.

Robert Dunn
Alessandra Morgan '12MS
Laura Wareck
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This special 125th anniversary edition of *Simmons Magazine* was printed by Lane Press in Burlington, VT. We welcome readers' comments. Contact us by mail at *Simmons Magazine*, Office of Advancement, 300 The Fenway, Boston, MA 02115; or by email at magazine@simmons.edu. Copyright © 2025, Simmons University. All publication rights reserved.

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PROLOGUE

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Diana Levine
Photographer

Meet the Deans,
Pg. 46

Based in Boston, Diana Levine has photographed Alicia Keys, Kim Kardashian, President Clinton, President Obama, Ed Sheeran, and Usher. She has photographed for *Rolling Stone* magazine, *Billboard*, MTV, Converse, *Boston* magazine, and *Boston Globe Magazine*. “I had a blast photographing the Deans for this issue of *Simmons Magazine*! Before the photo shoot, I imagined they would be pretty serious—but they were all super funny and reminded me of an improv troupe! And I loved photographing all the students—it was a joy to learn about their lives at Simmons. I especially loved chatting with Kayla Pringle ’26 (Pg. 16) and discussing all of our recent reads!”



Dana Smith
Illustrator

Founded for Equality.
Built for Now, Pg. 20

Boston-based editorial illustrator and photographer Dana Smith has produced work for numerous newspapers and universities, including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Harvard University, and Brown. As someone who savors collecting photographs and mementos from his own personal history, Smith was delighted to create an archivaly imbued cover and feature illustration for this anniversary issue. “The idea that [my] illustration might someday become a folded up, weathered, torn, and crunchy piece of paper that is dug up from the bottom of the Simmons University Archives generations from now is one of the most wonderful things I can imagine,” he says.



Kelly Davidson
Photographer

Challenging the Process,
Pg. 52

Originally from Connecticut, Kelly Davidson moved to Boston in 1997 to study photojournalism at Boston University. She honed her skills at *The Boston Phoenix* before opening Kelly Davidson Studio. An award-winning photographer known for her portraiture work and authentic approach to her subjects, Davidson has worked for Sub Pop Records, CVS, Partners HealthCare, Harvard University, MIT, Boston College, and Berklee College of Music. In this issue, Davidson traveled to Cambridge, MA and Newport, RI before finally setting foot on the Simmons campus. Fun fact: Davidson plays in an adult field hockey league on a team founded by former Simmons players, The Rusty Sharks.



Luisa Jung
Illustrator

Defying Gravity,
Pg. 34

Born and raised in Argentina, architecture-trained illustrator Luisa Jung resides in Cologne, Germany. Her client portfolio includes *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Rolling Stone Germany*, and beyond. Jung’s artistic work has garnered numerous recognitions, nationally and internationally. “What I loved about this assignment was the opportunity to tell a story through the portrait, rather than focusing solely on the sitter’s likeness,” Jung says, reflecting on rendering Gregory Maguire ’78MA. “Illustration for me is all about ideas. I also listened to the soundtrack of *Wicked* on a loop while I was painting, so working on this portrait was a kind of immersive experience.”



Making Connections, Building Community

Simmons Network is an exclusive online community for Simmons alumnae/i to build professional and personal networks.

Networking

Find alumnae/i who share career and personal interests, and connect through groups, messaging, or events.

Mentoring

Elevate your career by connecting to other alumnae/i for mentoring relationships.

Giving Back

Share news and job opportunities with your classmates and the Simmons community.

Join with your *LinkedIn*, *Facebook*, or *email account at **simmonsnetwork.net*** or download the *Gradway Community* app on the App Store or *Simmons Network* on Google Play.

Puzzle Answers

See the “Built to Last” Puzzle, Pg. 55.

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Honoring the Past and Celebrating What Lies Ahead

➔ One of the most rewarding parts of being president of Simmons is the joy and inspiration I receive from my daily interactions with students, faculty, staff, and alumnae/i. The passion and energy of our community is infectious and far reaching. No matter where I travel, I meet individuals who either graduated from Simmons or who know someone who graduated from Simmons. From California to New York, two common threads are infused in these interactions: an appreciation for the transformative power of a Simmons education and an expression of enormous pride in this institution.

This pride I believe is directly related to one of the things I most admire about Simmons, and that is its willingness to embrace innovation to uphold and propel our founding mission forward.

Simmons was founded for equality with the idea that women, through education, could achieve greater financial security and independence. Throughout its history, Simmons has demonstrated a unique ability to navigate the cutting edge of change to advance John Simmons' vision. While specific course offerings and buildings may evolve with the times, this institution's mission remains vital and enduring.

This commitment to utilizing education to advance social and economic equity is a key reason why our institution has such a critical role to play today. The world needs Simmons. Our institution was built for this moment. The learning and experiences offered here—both inside and outside of the classroom—prepare graduates to be everyday leaders who thrive in their careers and make our communities stronger. As we embark upon the next 125 years, we will remain laser-focused on honoring this legacy by ensuring more students can access a Simmons education.

This institution's 125th anniversary is an opportunity for us to reflect, find new inspiration, and most of all celebrate and share the remarkable Simmons story. You are a part of this story, and it is an honor to celebrate this historic moment with you. I look forward to seeing you during the 125th Anniversary Reunion this summer.

Lynn P. Wooten

Lynn Perry Wooten

President

FOREWORD

SIMMONS NEWS AND NOTES

Simmons on the Rise

The Living and Learning Center will be a vibrant epicenter for the entire Simmons community, providing modern living, athletic, wellness, study, and dining spaces for students, and the opportunity for greater connection and events.

Pg. 6



FOREWORD

CAMPUS UPDATES



College Tour

Exploring the new
Living and Learning Center.
By Laura Wareck

➔ The Living and Learning Center, the final phase of the once-in-a-generation One Simmons project, will serve as a vibrant epicenter for the entire Simmons community to share. Slated to open in January 2027, it features welcoming living spaces for students, a modern fitness and wellness center, two dining spaces, event spaces, and areas to connect, study, and socialize. A topping off ceremony for the Living and Learning Center will take place during the 125th Anniversary Reunion this summer.

▲ **Main Entrance**
The entrance to the Living and Learning Center is the first space to experience in this extraordinary building. The left side of the entrance will feature an outdoor seating area lined by bricks purchased and personalized by alumnae/i and friends.

▼ **Student Residence Room**
One of the rooms that will be home to more than 1,000 students, these bright, light-filled spaces are climate-controlled and ADA-compliant, and feature sustainable lighting and flexible furniture. The residence rooms, which consist of singles, doubles, triples, and select four-person suites, feature 360-degree views of the Boston skyline.





▲ **Fitness and Recreation Center**

The new fitness and recreation center offers a variety of cardio and weight lifting equipment—including treadmills, bikes, elliptical machines, free weights, a spinning studio, and more—for use by our entire community. The exterior windows overlook the quad and academic buildings.



▲ **Natorium**

The bleachers provide an ideal space to watch swimming and diving meets in the eight-lane, NCAA-compliant natatorium. The floor-to-ceiling windows allow tremendous natural light and include a trampoline pit that provides extra practice space for divers.



▲ **University Gymnasium**

The gymnasium provides ample space for any court sport, including volleyball, basketball, and pickleball. In addition, a movable batting cage allows for year-round field practice for softball and lacrosse. The space is also designed to host large University events with movable screens and a state-of-the-art sound system.



▲ **Main Lobby, Central Stairs, and First Floor Cafe**

The ground floor level of the Living and Learning Center features gathering spaces and a cafe accented by a cozy, two-story fireplace. Comfortable seating provides opportunities for quiet reading or contemplation as well as casual conversation and meetings. The cafe offers casual dining along with grab-and-go food service.

▲ **Dining Hall**

The second level of the dining hall offers a large space with a variety of all-you-care-to-eat food options for students, faculty, and staff. Special features include an allergy-safe station, smoothie bar, stone pizza oven, salad bar, and many other options.

“One Simmons is our vision for the future and is built for collaboration, inclusion, and accessibility.”

Laura Brink Pisinski '06MS,
Vice President of University Real Estate Development and Facilities Management



▲ **Student Lounge on Residence Floor**

Each of the 14 residential floors features multiple student lounges that are equipped for a variety of activities, such as studying, meeting, socializing, meditating, or yoga. Large windows provide expansive views of the Boston skyline, while soft seating provides space for conversation, games, and other activities.

Repairing 'The Broken Rung'

How women can succeed
when their career ladder breaks.

By *Alisa M. Libby*



*"It's critical. It's critical.
What changes me, changes we."*

▲
Susan MacKenty Brady,
CEO of the Simmons University
Institute for Inclusive Leadership

➔ If more women are working than ever, why do women make up only 29% of high-level executives? According to McKinsey and Company's 10-year report, "Women in the Workplace 2024," early career promotions into managerial positions tend to be challenging for women to achieve.

This disparity in career advancement, termed "The Broken Rung," paints a picture of stark contrasts in executive careers. As reported by WBZ, for every 100 men promoted, there are 81 women who receive the same advancement. For Latinas, it's 65, and only 54 for Black women.

"A massive amount of value is lost when we aren't fully tapping into the available talent in our organizations," Susan MacKenty Brady, CEO of the Simmons University Institute for Inclusive Leadership, told WBZ. "The traction of early promotion is where we need to mend, and where we need to lift up and create more resources and more opportunity for women."

To avoid losing the full value of their employees' talents and abilities, organizations would benefit from offering mentorships and other resources to the women they employ. MacKenty Brady noted that Simmons offers the Strategic Leadership Accelerator, a research-based program for early career professionals looking to accelerate their career. Designed by and for women leaders, the Accelerator offers guidance in navigating the complexities faced by women professionals, empowering them to lead with confidence and intention.

MacKenty Brady urged women to act now to avoid the "Broken Rung," and offer aid to the women coming up the ladder behind them. "It's critical. It's critical. What changes me, changes we," she told WBZ.



Shreya Bhattacharyya

Simmons University was awarded more than \$725,000 in grant funding from the prestigious Henry Luce Foundation to support students pursuing STEM careers and a woman faculty member in the Chemistry and Physics Department. Two separate grants will fund scholarships for students pursuing accelerated dual-degree engineering and STEM-related bachelor's degrees. A Clare Boothe Luce Professorship has been granted to Shreya Bhattacharyya, an Associate Teaching Professor in chemistry at Simmons. The grants will also enable Simmons to launch two new STEM enrichment programs, aimed at boosting students' confidence, retention, and success in STEM education by addressing common barriers that prevent long-term success in these fields.



Lynn Perry Wooten

To honor Black History Month 2025, MassLive featured Black leaders throughout the state of Massachusetts who are performing significant and meaningful work. Simmons University President Lynn Perry Wooten is among the 10 individuals spotlighted. "Growing up in Philadelphia, Lynn Wooten, the ninth president of Simmons University and the institution's first African-American president, was taught the importance of academic and Black excellence," MassLive reported. In the interview, Wooten offered this advice: "Be a lifelong, life-wide learner. If there's one thing that really defines who I am, I'm always trying to be my best self through learning. Reading books, studying, learning through people, taking classes—every experience I see as a learning interaction."



Elizabeth Carr '04

In 1981, Elizabeth Carr '04 made headlines as the first in-vitro baby born in the United States. "IVF was my parents' only hope of creating the family they so desperately wanted after experiencing three ectopic pregnancies. ... My birth gave hope to millions of Americans who wanted to become mothers and fathers," she wrote in an article in WBUR's Cognoscenti. In response to the recent Alabama Supreme Court ruling that frozen embryos constitute "extrauterine children," Carr wrote: "No one understands better than the infertility community that embryos are not children. Success in IVF means bringing home a baby, not solely creating embryos." Carr wrote about her experience in her memoir, *Under the Microscope: The USA's First IVF Baby* (Bristol Books, 2021).

Additional News of Note

Suzanne Leonard, Professor of Literature and Writing and Director of the Graduate Program in Gender and Cultural Studies, shared how "Sex and the City" may be perceived by new viewers in an interview with *The Los Angeles Times*.

Jason Homer '11MS, '26PhD, Executive Director of the Worcester Library, spoke to *MassLive* about his work and how it is "a privilege to champion the fundamental role libraries play in fostering informed and equitable societies."

The Boston Globe quoted **Sanda Erdelez**, Dean of the Simmons School of Library and Information Science, on the resilience of public libraries.

In an interview with *The Boston Globe*, **Kaylee Richard '28**, program director of Girls at Work, discussed the impact of the nonprofit, which trains girls in traditionally male-dominated trades, including woodworking.

After thousands of residents were displaced in Haiti in 2024, Assistant Professor of Literature and Writing **Patrick Sylvain** shared his thoughts with *The Bay State Banner* on how Haiti can move beyond the crisis.

Joanna Almeida, professor and Eva Whiting White Endowed Chair in the Simmons School of Social Work, was quoted in *Medical Xpress* about her study of the factors impacting preterm birth in Massachusetts.

Stacy Whitman '05MA celebrated the first anniversary of her bookstore, The Curious Cat Bookshop in Winsted, CT, during an interview with *CT Insider*.

In an interview with *Simmons News*, **Oksana Hradyska '12** celebrated the 10th anniversary of her nonprofit, Sitters for Scholars, which addresses the lack of affordable and reliable childcare for college and low-income, single parents.

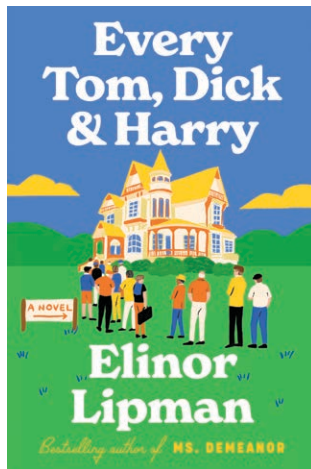
Publishers Weekly shared highlights from The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art's 17th annual Carle Honors event, including the Mentor Award that was presented to *The Horn Book*, represented by editor-in-chief **Elissa Gershowitz '00MA**.



Molly Riportella '12MS, a librarian in Westwood, Massachusetts, was interviewed by CNN about her plan to discreetly supply resources to people in violent relationships. Riportella carved hidden compartments into the pages of discarded books. She filled each hollowed-out book with a burner phone, programmed with numbers and email addresses for local shelters, links to free attorneys, and other social services. She's created BiblioUnderground.org, a grassroots effort to distribute the hidden phones and connect people with much-needed resources.

Must Reads

➤ Simmons University is proud of its talented faculty and alumnae/i authors, who represent a diverse array of published works. Interested in mystery, fantasy, history, folklore, or political commentary? Take a look at these recent titles to add to your reading list.



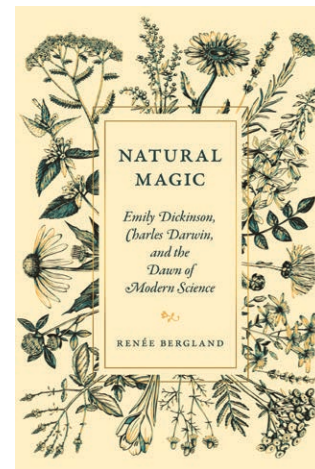
***Every Tom, Dick & Harry* by Elinor Lipman '72 (Harper)**

Lipman's 18th published book mines the secrets of a small Massachusetts town. As manager of her parent's estate-sale business, Emma Lewis is tasked with clearing out a local bed and breakfast that promises to be a massive sale. In the process, she discovers the truth: the grand mansion operated a brothel behind its closed, elegant doors. *Publisher's Weekly* says "... the dialogue is snappy and witty. Lipman's fans and newcomers alike will be tickled." According to *Booklist*, "In the delightfully reassuring rom-com tradition of Nora Ephron, the perennially mood-lifting Lipman is equally revered for her lovable characters, spitfire wit, and happily-ever-after romantic escapades."



***Elphie: A Wicked Childhood* by Gregory Maguire '78MA (William Morrow)**

Before *Wicked* came to the big screen in 2024, Maguire had returned to some of the material discarded from his original draft of *Wicked: The Life and Times of The Wicked Witch of the West* (ReganBooks, 1995). The result is *Elphie: A Wicked Childhood*. In our conversation with Maguire (Pg. 34), he expressed the suspicion that other writers would take up the task of writing Elphaba's early life if he neglected to do so. "I want to do it first," he says. "I had a sense of what her life was like. I want to make sure that what I think is out there in the world."



***Natural Magic: Emily Dickinson, Charles Darwin, and the Dawn of Modern Science* by Professor Renée Bergland '09EE (Princeton University Press)**

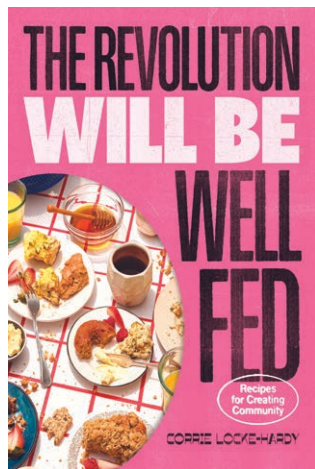
Natural Magic is a contemplation on science, nature, and poetry from the perspectives of two great thinkers of the 19th century, both enchanted by the natural world. According to *Kirkus Reviews*, "literature professor Bergland pairs Dickinson and Darwin to chart a profound transitional stage in Western intellectual history: a shift toward the separation of scientific and artistic perspectives. The author demonstrates how both figures rejected this shift, and their scrupulously attentive considerations of the natural world affirmed the presence of mysterious, awe-inspiring energies and interconnections."



▲ Elinor Lipman '72

Other Notable Publications

There Is a Door in This Darkness by Kristin Cashore '04MA (Penguin Young Readers Group) / ***It Came from the Trees*** by Ally Russell '15MFA (Penguin Random House) / ***The Blood Orchid*** by Kylie Lee Baker '22MS (Hodder & Stoughton) / ***The Bloomsbury Handbook of Hip Hop Pedagogy*** anthology edited by Lauren Leigh Kelly and School of Social Work Professor Daren Graves (Bloomsbury) / ***My Cousin's Mermaid: A Story from Poland*** by Anna Staniszewski '06MA/MFA (Barefoot Books) / ***Public Relations Planning: A Practical Guide for Strategic Communication*** by Professor Edward T. Vieira, Jr., and Associate Professor Yulong Li (2nd edition, Routledge) / ***A Global Racial Enemy: Muslims and 21st-Century Racism*** by Associate Professor Saher Selod, Inaash Islam, Steve Garner (Polity) / ***The Organization of Information*** by Daniel Joudrey, Professor and Director of Libraries and Librarianship Concentration (5th edition, Bloomsbury Libraries Unlimited, Summer 2025) / ***Domestic Darkness: An Insider's Account of the January 6 Insurrection, and the Future of Right-Wing Extremism*** by Julie Farnam '00 (Ig Publishing) / ***Enslavement in the Puritan Village: The Untold History of Sudbury and Wayland, Massachusetts*** by Jane Sciacca '68 (The History Press)



The Revolution Will Be Well Fed: Recipes for Creating Community by Corrie Locke-Hardy '20MA (Raspberry Bow Press)

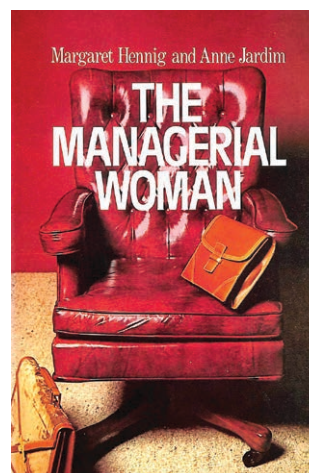
The author combines a passion for social justice education with past experience as a professional cook. “I had this idea to create a cookbook with recipes that are easy to share and eat with your hands and paired with social justice essays,” says Locke-Hardy in a recent interview. “The main message is community over capitalism. The easy recipes embody that community spirit.”



Most Ardently: A Pride & Prejudice Remix by Gabe Cole Novoa '19MA (Feiwell & Friends)
Practical Rules for Cursed Witches by Kayla Cottingham '20MS (Delacorte)
The Forbidden Book by Sacha Lamb '20MS/MA (Levine Querido)

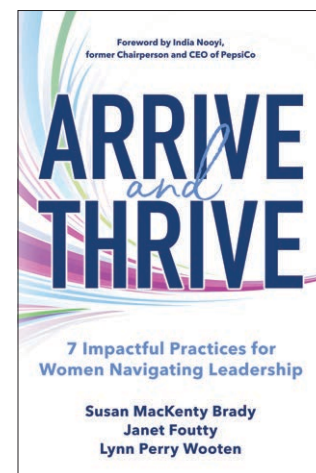
LGBTQIA+ representation is currently thriving in the fantasy market, with these titles as prime examples of the trend. Novoa retells an Austen classic with a genderqueer character leading a double life. Cottingham's titular witch falls in love with a girl entangled in her own dangerous curse. Lamb's novel tells the folkloric story of a genderqueer lesbian in a Jewish village who adopts a new identity to escape a marriage.

Two Generations of Women's Business Leadership



The Managerial Woman by Margaret Hennig '62 and Anne Jardim '13HD (Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974)

With the relaunch of the Simmons School of Management, we want to highlight this book, by Dr. Anne Jardim and Dr. Margaret Hennig, who founded the Simmons University School of Business in 1974. Upon its initial publication, *Kirkus* offered a starred review: “An engrossing analysis of the reasons women are still a fractional minority of the high-priced executive class, and a close look at 25 who've succeeded in the corporate world despite the odds against them.”



Arrive and Thrive: 7 Impactful Practices for Women Navigating Leadership by Susan MacKenty Brady, Janet Foutty '05EE, and Lynn Perry Wooten (McGraw Hill, 2022)

A more recent addition to the genre of women's leadership, this book is co-authored by Simmons President Lynn Perry Wooten, CEO of the Simmons Institute for Inclusive Leadership Susan MacKenty Brady, and Executive Chair of the Board of Deloitte US, Janet Foutty. The book provides insights from the co-authors' rich careers, features advice from top leaders, and discusses the seven impactful practices to help women navigate leadership so they can thrive at every stage of their careers.

FOREWORD

JOURNAL

“From the classroom to the lab, from mentoring peers to driving change in the SGA, each day at Simmons is an opportunity to grow, connect, and make a difference.”

▶ Zeena Acharya '25



A Day in the Life

What a typical day as a Simmons student looks like.

By Zeena Acharya '25

➔ **10am:** My first stop before a busy and exciting day is Common Grounds to grab breakfast. As I walk through the Main College Building, I'm reminded of the fun fact I learned when I first toured Simmons—the main lobby flooring is the original flooring of the building. I find it so inspiring to be walking on the same exact floors that fellow Simmons students walked on when the Main College Building first opened!

11am: After breakfast, I head to biochemistry, a very important class in my journey as a pre-med student. This course not only builds the foundation I need for the MCAT, but also fuels my excitement for the future. Every lecture is a step closer to my goal of attending medical school, and I love how the material challenges me to think critically and connect concepts. In the labs, our semester-long project has been an incredible opportunity to develop crucial lab skills. Working in the new science center in Lefavour Hall is such a privilege. The beautifully renovated space inspires creativity and focus.

12pm: After class, I transition into one of my favorite roles on campus: being a Simmons Academic Mentor (SAM). As a SAM, I support first-year students in navigating their academic journey at Simmons, though my role extends to helping all students, regardless of their year. Today, I spent my office hours assisting four students. From easing a student's registration stress by building their ideal schedule to sharing study strategies for general chemistry, I feel immense pride knowing my support makes a tangible impact. A student joked that I "cured five days' worth of stress" in a short meeting. Moments like these remind me why I love this role: It's all about building connections and empowering others.

2pm: It's time for lunch with friends at the Fens. The friendly staff, who never fail to brighten my day, greet us with warm smiles and high energy. Their encouragement, paired with delicious food, provides the perfect recharge for my busy day.

3:30pm: With lunch behind me, I dive into my role as the Student Body Vice President of the Student Government Association (SGA). Today's agenda includes a House of Rep-



▲ Acharya is the Student Body Vice President of the Student Government Association (SGA), where initiatives like the Academic Feedback and the Menstrual Equity resolutions are discussed.

representatives meeting, where we discuss student feedback and initiatives like the Academic Feedback and the Menstrual Equity resolutions. The latter resolution, passed in Spring 2024, advocates for free period products in residential dorm buildings. It's a cause that is close to my heart, reflecting Simmons' commitment to equity and social justice. Hearing students share their experiences with the initiative and brainstorming ways to improve the distribution boxes fills me with hope and determination to keep pushing for meaningful change.

7pm: As the day winds down, my friends and I decide to enjoy Boston's Fenway neighborhood. We head to Time Out Market, a favorite spot for its diverse food options and lively atmosphere. I am a huge foodie and love exploring Boston, so Simmons is in an ideal location! I grew up in central Massachusetts, but being in Boston every day is so special to experience firsthand the beautiful city culture.

From the classroom to the lab, from mentoring peers to driving change in the SGA, each day at Simmons is an opportunity to grow, connect, and make a difference. I'm proud to be part of a university that values learning, leadership, and social impact, and I can't wait to see what tomorrow holds!

Zeena Acharya '25 is a neuroscience and behavior major with a concentration in neurobiology and a minor in chemistry. Acharya is on a pre-med track and in the Simmons Honors Program.

Game Changers

Simmons student-athletes excel on and off the field.

By *Laura Wareck*

➔ Early mornings and late evenings. Long practices and rigorous academic courses. Team bonding and unforgettable moments. These are just a few of the hallmarks of the student-athlete experience at Simmons, according to field hockey player Sydney Gonyea '25 and softball pitcher Piper Kinney '26.

Being a student-athlete has been a core part of Gonyea and Kinney's identities for well over a decade. They first picked up their respective hockey stick and softball in elementary school. Their love of sport has only increased and it's a major reason why they chose Simmons.

"I've been so lucky to have the best teams," Gonyea says. "I've had great coaches and found my best friends through the sport. You go through the same challenges. You succeed together and there's nothing else like it."

Throughout their time at Simmons, Kinney and Gonyea have shined on and off the field. Kinney has played an integral role in the team's back-to-back Great Northeast Athletic Conference (GNAC) Softball championship titles. Those wins earned them a spot in the NCAA Division III Softball Championships, where they played the eventual NCAA III champion. In 2024, she ranked third in the nation in strikeouts with 200. Gonyea, meanwhile, was named the 2024 GNAC Offensive Player of the Year, earned a spot on the ALL-GNAC First Team, and finished the season with an impressive 15 multiple point games.

"Sydney and Piper are two excellent examples of our over 150 student-athletes here at Simmons," says Erica Schuling



“Field hockey is a major part of my identity. It’s made me who I am, and I’m so proud to be a student-athlete at Simmons.”

◀
Sydney Gonyea '25,
Field Hockey

“I’m really close with my team. We hold each other accountable. It’s one of the most important things I’ve learned.”

▼
Piper Kinney '26,
Softball



'13MS, '18MS, Director of Athletics and Recreation. “I’m constantly inspired by the profound impact sports have on shaping our student-athletes into leaders, teammates, and agents of positive change.”

Gonyea and Kinney’s athletic prowess comes with a host of responsibilities. Time management is critical. Kinney is a neuroscience major and public health minor on the pre-med track. On a normal weekday, she is awake by 6 a.m. and sometimes doesn’t return home until 10 p.m. Her training schedule includes a mix of lifting, conditioning, and softball practices. A SURPASs scholar, she also works in the Simmons labs doing cell culture research. She credits the team with helping to balance it all.

“I’m really close with my team,” Kinney says. “We hold each other accountable. It’s one of the most important things I’ve learned.”

Gonyea’s training regimen also includes a combination of weightlifting, conditioning, and practices. During the season, the field hockey team trains in the evenings at Daly Field. Gonyea enjoys the bus ride there, which she views as a welcome time to transition from student mode to athlete. As a social work major who plans to pursue a master’s degree after graduating this spring, she’s thinking about what’s next. An internship working with middle school students has made her realize she might be able to pursue two of her biggest passions: social work and sports.

“If I was a school social worker, I might also have the opportunity to coach field hockey,” Gonyea says. “I’ve been thinking about that and keeping my options open.”

Their love of athletics doesn’t end on the field. Gonyea and Kinney are part of the Simmons Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, and Gonyea currently serves as the committee president. One of the goals of the group, which is made up of nearly 50 students, is to strengthen the ties between the athlete and non-athlete community at Simmons. And it’s working. Both women have seen an increase in attendance at games and competitions across a variety of sports in recent seasons. “It’s been super exciting to help bridge that gap,” says Kinney. “We’ve been able to get a lot of people to games this year.”

While being a student-athlete can be challenging at times, the many memorable moments—from team breakfasts and dinners to hanging out during murder mystery parties—are what will stick with them. And when asked about the most difficult part of being a student-athlete, Gonyea didn’t hesitate.

“The fact that it’s ending,” she says. “Field hockey is a major part of my identity. It’s made me who I am, and I’m so proud to be a student-athlete at Simmons.”

Students Gain an ‘Edge’

The Simmons Edge accelerates academic growth and career success.

By *Laura Wareck*

➔ Simmons University has developed an innovative new program to address two of the biggest concerns facing students and families today: the value and cost of a college degree. The Simmons Edge—an integrated academic pathway that includes individualized academic and career advising, experiential learning, and accelerated graduate education—is delivering greater ROI to students.

“Higher education is one of the most important investments students will make in their lifetime,” says Simmons Provost Dr. Stephanie Cosner. “The Simmons Edge prepares students to thrive in today’s competitive job market—more quickly and affordably—so that they can achieve the greatest return on that investment.”

With the launch of the Simmons Edge, all undergraduate students will have the opportunity to graduate with an advanced degree in a wide selection of fields in as few as four or five years.

Accelerated graduate education is a key feature that drew Kayla Pringle ’26 to Simmons. A transfer student from Northeastern University, Pringle is pursuing the combined 3+1 bachelor’s degree in computer science and a master of science degree in library and information science.

“I knew I wanted to go to Simmons, and it was the only [transfer] school I applied to,” Pringle says. “I went to an all-girls Catholic high school and I’m happy to be back in this environment. When I did my application interview everyone was so personable, and I felt as though people really cared. It’s great to be heard and be consistently uplifted by my professors.”

For Pringle, the most appealing aspects of the Simmons Edge are the cost savings, and the ability to take two graduate-level courses as an undergraduate student. Even with a heavy academic load, she still has space to explore courses in different disciplines. This semester, she’s enrolled in her first ethics class; she previously enjoyed an advanced writing course designed specifically for engineers and library and information science students.

“I feel like the Simmons Edge is made for me while giving me a bit more room to explore and learn different kinds of things,” Pringle says. “Being on the accelerated track, I’ve also had the chance to meet other students I might not normally be able to. It’s been nice to connect with new people.”

Real-world experience is another core part of the Simmons Edge. In addition to her studies, Pringle participates in a research project with the Office of Accessibility Services in which she gathers

feedback from STEM-oriented students to learn more about their experiences, challenges, and the types of interventions that can be put in place to better support their academic success.

“This is the biggest research I’ve had the opportunity to be a part of so far,” Pringle says. “It’s been an amazing, wonderful experience.”

The Simmons Edge initiative continues to grow, and two new graduate programs are scheduled to launch within the next year in data science and management. For Pringle, the combination of computer and library science has brought together two of her passions. Her life has been shaped by the local librarians who encouraged her love of reading, learning, and exploring new books and ideas. After graduating, Pringle hopes to pursue a career at a public, community-oriented library.

“I love asking questions and librarians changed my life,” Pringle says. “I really want to do my best to use everything I have to give back. It’s thanks to people who did things like that for me that I’m able to be here now.”

“I feel like the Simmons Edge is made for me while giving me a bit more room to explore and learn different kinds of things.”

▼
Kayla Pringle ’26





The Essayists

Student perspectives on how Simmons has championed equality, from its founding to today.

➤ Every October, we mark the birthday of Simmons' founder, John Simmons, with an essay contest and celebration. In 2024, students were prompted to consider our motto for the 125th anniversary celebration, "Founded for Equality, Built for Now," inviting essays that considered what equality looked like at Simmons' founding in 1899, and how Simmons fosters equality 125 years later. In a break from tradition, three essay winners were selected: two students received honors, in addition to the first-place winner. Here are excerpts from the award-winning essays.

Abigail Gill '26

3+2 ENGINEERING PROGRAM

First-place essay winner

Under the leadership of its eighth President, Helen Drinan '75MS(LIS), '78MBA, '21HD, Simmons became the third women-centered institution in the country to welcome students who identify as transgender or non-binary. This decision created waves in what defines a women's college, encouraging the gradual shift in terminology when speaking about these institutions. We now like to use more inclusive terms that focus on the historical women-centered nature of our University, while celebrating students of diverse gender identities. Simmons has contributed to a cultural shift that continues to grow and disrupt patriarchal ideologies that have confined us for centuries. ... As a first-generation student, I sometimes bear the weight of imposter syndrome and insecurity. But when I think of those who came before me—pushing through doubt and breaking barriers—I'm reminded of the strength and determination that define this community.





“When I think of those who came before me—pushing through doubt and breaking barriers—I’m reminded of the strength and determination that define this community.”

◀
Abigail Gill '26,
 First-place essay winner, opposite page,
 and at left, pictured with President
 Lynn Perry Wooten, Kadyon Donovan '27,
 and Micah Joyce Guillermo '26

Micah Joyce Guillermo '26
 POLITICAL SCIENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS

I came from a country where gender inequality is deeply woven into the fabric of our society, stitches could be traced from access to education, employment opportunities, and even press freedom. In many ways, I was blinded to what equality truly looks like until I arrived at Simmons University. ... As I look ahead to the future, I envision a time when I can return to Simmons—not weighed down by the excess baggage of inequalities, but rather enriched by the lessons learned and the strength gained. ... My goal is to get rid of the excess baggage of inequality and carry the mission that John Simmons has stitched in my mind, which is to lead and thrive independently for equality.

Kadyon Donovan '27
 NURSING

When I transferred to Simmons, I was at a crossroads, struggling with my identity and my future. But here, I found a place to heal, to grow, and to believe in myself again. ... Simmons’ nursing program has been a space of intellectual rigor and emotional resilience, where I’ve not only learned how to care for others but also how to care for myself. The \$2 million nursing diversity initiative speaks volumes about Simmons’ commitment to addressing health care disparities and bringing more voices into the fold. As a future nurse, and as someone passionate about supporting marginalized communities, I am inspired by how the program empowers people like me to transform their unique experiences into professional strengths. Simmons is training nurses not just to treat illness but to heal systems of inequality.



FOUNDED FOR EQUALITY.

For 125 years, Simmons has stayed true to its founding mission—preparing women to earn an independent livelihood—while steadily updating academic programs and offerings to meet the needs of students *now*. The impact of that enduring commitment plays out across generations in countless ways. Simmons is built for so much.



I25

Simmons is built for...

LEARNING
22

KNOWLEDGE
24

INNOVATION
26

SOCIAL
JUSTICE
28

LEADERSHIP
30

MENTORSHIP
32

CREATIVITY
34

GIVING
BACK
36

BUILT FOR NOW.

Illustration by DANA SMITH



I25



THEN

The Legacy of John Simmons

For Simmons University Archivist Kelsey Kolbet '21MS/MA, a Simmons education is unique for balancing academic and practical skill sets. "You are trained in theory, while also getting hands-on, professional training," she says. "You get this perspective of looking at the world as a whole rather than as parts. We are making sense of things in a more integrative way."

This model of learning is enshrined in Article 16 of founder John Simmons' bequest, which contains his foundational vision for Simmons Female College (renamed Simmons College in 1915 and Simmons University in 2018). The College's explicit mission was to educate women and secure their independent livelihoods.

Eventually known as the "Merchant Prince of Boston," John Simmons (1796–1870) made his fortune in the clothing manufacturing industry and was an early innovator of the ready-made men's suit. The University Archives retains one of John Simmons' surviving looms, which, for Kolbet, symbolizes his democratization of clothing and women's education.

In her biography of the University's founder, *John Simmons: The Measure of a Man*, Denise Doherty Pappas '71, '85MBA argues that Simmons was inspired to improve the socioeconomic prospects of the women laborers he contracted. "From its inception, Simmons classes prepared women for the labor force and for self-discovery," she writes.

"The institution was very forward-thinking for its time and was always thinking outside the box concerning more conduits for equality," Kolbet says. Unsurprisingly, Simmons students across the generations are remembered for their activism.

John Simmons' legacy symbolizes the transformative power of higher education. Concluding her 2024 Founder's Day presentation, Kolbet said, "It is through our actions that his legacy lives on."

To read extended versions of select features, see simmons.edu/go/125magazine.

NOW

Learning by Design

Studio 5—a student-run communications agency—offers seniors real-world experiences. *By Kathryn Dickason*

"Studio 5 offers seniors the chance to have an agency experience. ... They work with real-world clients and receive hands-on training, with a mentor in the background," says Assistant Professor of Communications Kat Lombard-Cook, who supervises Studio 5 (COMM 390).

Essentially a student-run communications agency, Studio 5 constitutes the senior Capstone project for communications and public relations/marketing communications majors at Simmons. The students work as teams across three departments: Account Management, Creative, or Project Management.

Lombard-Cook explains that "experiential-based learning is really key. ... There is a shift in the brain [with applied learning]. When you reach an understanding of something and then have to create it for a client, it becomes real."

Audrey "Mack" MacKenzie '21, now the Marketing Coordinator for University Communications, appreciated this direct application of knowledge. "Having that hands-on work experience was formative," she says.

For this semester-long course, seniors choose their clients. In her supervisory capacity, Lombard-Cook guides students through the call for proposals, offers design-related critiques, and provides technical support. Her eclectic artistic and scholarly background lends an interpretive dimension to Studio 5's structure and aims. "The core question that interests me, both in my scholarly research and creative work, is how we make meaning," she says. With her students, Lombard-Cook discusses issues of audience engagement and deep empathy.

Under Lombard-Cook's supervision, Studio 5 focuses on nonprofit clients, both locally and nationally. This enables students

"to create value-driven work for themselves and their communities ... [that] is very much in line with the mission of the University and the Gwen Ifill School of Media, Humanities, and Social Sciences," she explains.

In Fall 2024, students chose two local clients: Eastie Farm (East Boston) and University Communications (UComms) at Simmons. "In an area of Boston with only one grocery store for a population of over 40,000 people, Eastie Farm offers Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) boxes for East Boston residents. Our team agreed that this was a great program that should be accessed by more people," says Ash Cardinal '25, a communications major concentrating on integrated media. Along-

side other members of the Creative Team, Cardinal recounts that "we conducted market research and produced four marketing fliers, with a Spanish translated version for each. We also created a social media guide

and content calendar to help them plan out social media posts promoting the CSA."

Excited to embrace a "for students, by students" approach to UComms, Studio 5 "produced three social media videos [documenting spaces on campus, activities to do around Boston, and the distinctive spirit of Simmons' community] that were designed for prospective students," says Kathryn Janssen '25, who is majoring in communications (integrated media concentration) and minoring in radio and journalism.

"We also created an ambassador program where students will have a work-study opportunity to work with UComms as the faces of Simmons," she adds.

Reflecting on this mode of experiential learning, Lombard-Cook says, "Studio 5 exemplifies how Simmons students 'own' the curriculum."

"Studio 5 exemplifies how Simmons students 'own' the curriculum."

Kat Lombard-Cook,
Assistant Professor of Communications

NOW

Speaking Volumes

Cambridge Director of Libraries Maria McCauley '17PhD fosters learning and community. *By Laura Wareck*

Maria McCauley '17PhD says some of her fondest childhood memories are of visiting her local public library. In addition to books, she enjoyed borrowing items—everything from fishing rods and camcorders to her favorite children's activity books.

This lifelong passion for knowledge is part of the reason she decided to pursue library and information science as a second career.

"The library field is both a helping profession and an intellectually stimulating profession," McCauley says. "It uses both our hearts and our minds. It's also a community-building field and a knowledge-creation field."

A former arts administrator, McCauley received a prestigious American Library Association (ALA) Spectrum Scholarship and later earned her doctorate from the Simmons School of Library and Information Science (SLIS).

McCauley describes the PhD program at Simmons as a transformational and memorable experience, bringing practitioners together to study library science and leadership. At the beginning of each semester, McCauley and her classmates—a cohort of individuals who now lead libraries across the country and internationally—would come together before returning to their respective homes to study and work.

"It is a groundbreaking and special program," she says. "We had amazing professors of practice who are big leaders in the field. It was this fertile environment to explore concepts and learn how to write different types of papers and read and conduct research."

Some of McCauley's most memorable experiences at Simmons involve the faculty and staff, including a snowy winter evening in Boston when she met then-Assistant Dean Em Claire Knowles '88DA, '07E.

"She stayed with me during a snowstorm to talk about the PhD program," McCauley says. "It was wonderful of her to do that."

For the past eight years, McCauley has served as Director of Libraries for the City of Cambridge, MA. In this role, she oversees seven library branches, leads a team of more than 150 staff members, and works closely with partners and funders to advance the library system's mission.

"It's an extraordinary experience," McCauley says. "I love walking through the library and seeing community members using our spaces and resources, and our expert staff who are so welcoming."

Still, McCauley describes the current moment as a time of great uncertainty for libraries, particularly given attacks on intellectual freedom and the right to read, staffing and funding pressures,

and the proliferation of artificial intelligence and misinformation. Though the challenges can be daunting, she knows libraries are more than worth the effort.

"One of the most beautiful things about public libraries is that they truly welcome all," she says. "They help people live their very best lives through community building, information provision, and knowledge creation."

McCauley's work championing libraries doesn't stop in Cambridge. An active member in a variety of library associations and the Freedom to Read Foundation, she has also participated in the Joint Council of Librarians of Color and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions conference. In addition, she has served in several national leadership positions and is a strong advocate on behalf of libraries at the local, state, and national levels. Currently, she is running to be the next president of the ALA.

For those who want to support their communities, McCauley has a simple request: "Get your library card. Check out your local library and find out what it has to offer."

In addition, individuals can sign the Unite Against Book Bans pledge, or contact their local elected officials and let them know why libraries should continue to receive funding. For McCauley, the answer is clear.

"Libraries are limitless in their ability to transform lives," McCauley says. "They offer so much, books and beyond. We see all of humanity and we embrace all of humanity in our libraries."

*"Libraries are limitless
in their ability
to transform lives."*

Maria McCauley '17PhD

THEN

Cultivating a Collection

Theodora Kimball Hubbard, Class of 1908, 1917MS (1887–1935), was a librarian and landscape architect who studied library and information science at Simmons. Early in her career, she served as a writer for *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* and as a library assistant at the Boston Public Library. From 1911 to 1924, Hubbard worked at Harvard University's School of Landscape Architecture—becoming the

first individual to hold the title Landscape Architecture Librarian. While at Harvard, Hubbard more than doubled the School's collection of books and pamphlets. She published numerous bibliographies, books, and magazine articles on city planning and landscape architecture. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. commissioned Hubbard to edit his father's papers for publication. She also served on President Herbert Hoover's Advisory Committee on Zoning.



Theodora Kimball Hubbard, Class of 1908, 1917MS



Maria McCauley '17 PhD



Clockwise from above,
Gina Gawargi '27,
MJ Vasquez '26, and
Fuma Iwakura '27

NOW

An Exact Science

Simmons students thrive as future STEM leaders and innovators. *By Laura Wareck*

Educating future leaders and innovators in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields is a priority for the School of Sciences and Health Professions. Thanks to dedicated faculty and funding from organizations such as NASA and the Henry Luce Foundation, Simmons students have access to a robust array of internship, research, and mentoring opportunities.

Those opportunities, combined with a women-centered learning environment, result in a thriving STEM experience. “At first I didn’t know if I wanted to go to a women-centered college, but there hasn’t been a moment in class where I’ve been annoyed like I was in co-ed classrooms,” Gina Gawargi ’27 says.

Gawargi, who plans to major in neuroscience on the pre-med track, says some of her most memorable Simmons experiences are associated with her work as a chemistry teaching assistant. “I like the responsibility of talking to students, making those connections, and helping them move forward,” she says. “It’s also helpful for me to cement the basics.”

For Fuma Iwakura ’27, the decision to pursue a biology major and public health minor on the pre-physician assistant track is a personal one. During freshman year of high school, they were diagnosed with leukemia and spent six months in the hospital. Iwakura received a bone marrow transplant and is approaching five years of remission. The experience has shaped their life and future career.

“I had the chance to observe a lot of roles in the health care industry—not just doctors, but social workers, child life spe-

cialists, and others,” they say. “In the future, I want to be able to interact with patients, understand, and explain things.”

Their experience at Simmons, thus far, has been empowering. “It’s been so reassuring interacting with faculty and learning more about the research they do,” Iwakura says. “The small class sizes have also been helpful. They’ve made me less scared to ask questions, and it’s easier to get to know people.”

The STEM fields also hold a strong personal connection for MJ Vasquez ’26, a chemistry major who is part of Simmons’ 3+2 engineering program. She’s pursuing a STEM career in part to help families like hers who are predisposed to cancer. “It’s really hard to find food and hair products without carcinogens in them,” she says. “I

like the chemical side of engineering and want to make healthier products more accessible to people.”

Both Gawargi and Vasquez participate in lab research with Dr. Arpita Saha, where they synthesize and study metal-based complexes for use in chemotherapy drugs.

“Not a lot of universities give their undergraduate students so many opportunities in labs,” says Gawargi. “There’s so much freedom here and

the research opportunities are really good.”

Iwakura, Gawargi, and Vasquez are part of the Dynamic Research Education Academy for Mentoring (DREAM) program, which currently has about 60 student participants. The NASA-funded initiative helps increase the retention of Simmons students in STEM fields.

“The DREAM program really thinks about the things that will help us in the long run,” Vasquez says. “I’ve signed up for LinkedIn, reviewed my résumé, participated in alumnae/i events, and applied for internships that are really competitive. I don’t know if I would have been able to do all those things by myself.”

“Not a lot of universities give their undergraduate students so many opportunities in labs. There’s so much freedom here.”

Gina Gawargi ’27

THEN

Ahead of Her Time

Simmons Alumna Elizabeth “Libby” Backofen ’46 believed in the transformative power of STEM fields, calling science “the future of civilization.”

After graduating as a chemistry major from Simmons, she conducted research at MIT in conjunction with The Manhattan Project—a top-secret World War II government program where the United States rushed to develop the first atomic weapons before Nazi Germany. Backofen also



Elizabeth “Libby” Backofen ’46

taught high school mathematics and chemistry classes. Her bequest to Simmons has been used to establish the Elizabeth Backofen Endowed Professorship and Elizabeth Backofen Endowed Scholarship, helping generations of aspiring scientists prepare for their life’s work.

NOW

Pride and Policy

Rayna Hill '22MA/MPP is deeply invested in achieving social justice for LGBTQ Youth. *By Kathryn Dickason*

“For me, social justice entails creating a more equitable world, but it must be informed by people and communities with lived experience [of oppression],” says Rayna Hill '22MA/MPP, Legislative and Policy Manager for the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth. The Commission is an independent state agency that holds state policymakers responsible for creating inclusive policies and resources that help LGBTQ+ young people thrive.

“I grew up as an LGBTQ-identifying individual in a very conservative area [of eastern Maryland]. I never felt that I was heard by government officials who were supposed to represent me. ... So, I was drawn to advocacy from an early age,” Hill recalls.

Hill was promoted to her current Commission position two months after her Simmons graduation. In this role, she performs legislative and policy advocacy and oversees research development. She maintains a consistent dialogue with community members—including young people (ages 25 and under), parents, family members, and educators who might be impacted by state-wide legislation, and helps ensure that bills circulated within the State House are LGBTQ-inclusive. The Commission frequently collaborates with other state agency partners, namely the Department of Public Health and the Department of Youth Services, on policy and community engagement-related issues.

“I am motivated to uplift those voices who are most affected by systems of inequality—racism, homophobia, and transphobia—and to break apart these systemic barriers

[with] ... new policies and programs,” Hill says. “We want to make sure that young people aren’t being left behind or underserved by the state of Massachusetts. ... Ultimately, we want the state to be held accountable for the work they are supposed to be doing to serve LGBTQ people, their families, and educators.”

In recent years, the Commission has expanded its outreach and adopted intersectional advocacy. “When we practice intersectional advocacy, it demands that we stand up for who is the most marginalized person in the room, and who is going to be the most [negatively] impacted by particular policies and systems, such as child welfare, criminal justice, or education,” Hill explains. In other words, effective policies cannot endorse “a one-size-fits-all approach.”

Hill gravitated toward Simmons for its longstanding history of inclusion and LGBTQ+ rights. She pursued the dual master of arts in gender and cultural studies and master in public policy (which has since been reconstituted as a joint program).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hill took a social policy course with (former) Assistant Professor of Political Science Aaron Rosenthal in which students analyzed pandemic policies in real time. “Being able to address those real-world examples was so meaningful. ... For instance, we asked ourselves if the policies could be improved, and that experiential learning informs what I do today.”

For Hill, a gender studies lens is indispensable to her social justice work. “Gender studies gives people the tools that they need to be introspective and reflect more holistically [on gender and social inequity],” she explains. “Having specific terms to identify and unpack these processes helps me be an effective advocate.”

Mentoring, validating, and empowering others comprise the most rewarding aspects of Hill’s work. “I am one of the few people who can say I am doing exactly what I wanted to do, and exactly what I studied for. It is so gratifying.”

“I am one of the few people who can say I am doing exactly what I wanted to do, and exactly what I studied for. It is so gratifying.”

Rayna Hill '22MA/MPP,
Legislative and Policy Manager for the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth

THEN

An Advocate for Prisoners’ Rights

“I applaud people like Barbara Margolis ... who try to make a difference in people’s lives,” wrote former Deputy Warden Thomas Coppolino in *Rikers Island: Freedom From Within*. Rejecting a punitive approach to

incarcerated individuals, prisoners’ rights advocate Barbara Margolis ’51 (1929–2009) chose instead to nurture inmates’ capacity for self-growth.

After majoring in retailing at Simmons, Margolis volunteered at Rikers Island (the Bronx), the world’s largest penal complex. There she developed rehabilitation and career-transition programs for male inmates that

involved culinary education, athletics, horticulture, and journalism. Her most celebrated intervention, Fresh

Start, offers participants culinary training from professional chefs. As Margolis once conveyed to an associate, “I had the thrill of sending a Fresh Start graduate a wedding present. ... Can you imagine—sending a Fresh Start graduate a wedding gift?”

Curiously, Margolis’ inner circle could not recall what drew her to this work. Married to a former CEO of a Fortune 500 company and mingling with New York’s elite society, she seemed like an unlikely advocate for the incarcerated. Arriving at Rikers in a limousine, her sophisticated glamour rendered her a Joan Crawford lookalike. Whatever the reason for her involvement with Rikers, Margolis clearly believed in humankind’s capacity for change and recovery.



Barbara Margolis '51



Rayna Hill
'22MA/MPP



Esta Soler '68, '06HD

NOW

A Leader for All

Esta Soler '68, '06HD is the President of Futures Without Violence, a nationwide organization that aims to prevent violence against women and families.

By Kathryn Dickason

“Being a visionary leader means you have a vision to include others,” says Esta Soler '68, '06HD. “And this is something I learned from my family and from Simmons.”

Soler is the President of Futures Without Violence (FUTURES), a nationwide organization that aims to prevent violence against women and children that was officially founded (under a different name) in 1989. FUTURES focuses on ending violence and abuse today and strengthening families and communities to prevent violence in the future. “Our goal is to enable all individuals to live without fear of assault and harm. As an organization, we aim to prevent in-

tergenerational trauma, which means looking more at early childhood,” Soler says. “I see myself as an advocate for women and kids.”

Raised in a family of Ashkenazi Jewish émigrés, “I grew up with social justice for breakfast, lunch, and dinner,” Soler recalls. “My parents were extraordinary people who taught me that we have to work to make the world better [for all people].”

One of Soler’s first major milestones was helping to finalize the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA), first authorized in 1984. This groundbreaking legislation provides “[diverse] life-saving services for victims of domestic violence and their children.”

“We were taking something very private and silent and putting it out there in plain sight,” Soler explains. “Before FVPSA, people assumed that domestic abuse was a private problem and was not for public concern.” Working with United States Representative George Miller (California) and other trusted collaborators, Soler was one of the architects of this landmark bill.

Following the success of FVPSA, Soler and her team were deeply



A Civil Rights Pioneer

Obstetrician, physician, and civil rights activist Dr. Dorothy Celeste Boulding Ferebee, Class of 1920 (1898–1980), “was the most recognizable African American woman in America [from the mid-1930s to the early 1970s],” writes Diane Kiesel in her 2015 biography, *She Can Bring Us Home: Dr. Dorothy Boulding Ferebee, Civil Rights Pioneer*. An early advocate of reproductive rights and gender equity, Ferebee was a visionary ahead of her time.

At Simmons, Ferebee pursued medical secretarial studies and joined the prestigious Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., (AKA), the first collegiate historically African American sisterhood. She studied medicine at Tufts University as the only Black woman in her class.

Following medical school, Ferebee became an obstetrician at the Black-owned Freedmen’s Hospital (now Howard University Hospital) in Washington, DC. In 1925, she joined the faculty of Howard University Medical School.

From 1935 to 1942, Ferebee directed the Mississippi Health Project, sponsored by AKA to bring more equitable health care access to Black sharecroppers and tenant farmers in the Deep South. In 1949, she became President of the National Council of Negro Women.

Shortly after her passing, an editorial from *The Washington Post* crystallized Ferebee’s courageous spirit: “Dorothy Ferebee—spurning discouragement and goading herself always to ‘keep moving and keep busy’—knew how to do so, with a marvelous blend of compassion, cussedness, and class.”



Dr. Dorothy Celeste Boulding Ferebee, Class of 1920

involved in crafting another historic piece of legislation, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Then Senator Joe Biden was one of its champions, and in 1994 it was signed into law by President Bill Clinton. VAWA creates and supports “comprehensive, cost-effective responses to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.”

Writing for *Ms. Magazine* in September 2024, Soler declared VAWA a major turning point in United States history: “As we mark the 30th anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act ... it’s worth remembering one lesson that law teaches: Progress is possible.” In September 2024, Soler visited the White House to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of VAWA with President Biden and other key collaborators.

In recent years, Soler extended her programming to include resources for boys and men. “Our group had a conversation with President Biden ... about how men can be involved with our movement,” she recounts. “That’s when our organization, Futures Without Violence,

created Coaching Boys Into Men [CBIM]. ...

We want to make sure that as we continue to progress, we invite men into the conversation, not indict them,” Soler explains.

Looking back at her undergraduate education, Soler believes that attending a women’s college shaped her capacity to lead. “Simmons was such a supportive environment

“I think that risk-taking is one of the central tenets of leadership. ... Never be afraid to put yourself in difficult situations; don’t go narrow, go wide.”

Esta Soler '68, '06HD,
President of Futures Without Violence

for our development as future leaders. I am such a fangirl of women’s colleges.” During her time at Simmons, Soler majored in psychology and was active in the Student Government Association (SGA). “This experience was a training ground for leadership,” she says, and “an important exercise in negotiation and compromise.”

Soler’s most cherished Simmons-related memory occurred off campus, years after her graduation. While sitting in the PBS studio waiting to be interviewed by former *NewsHour* anchor Judy Woodruff, she saw Gwen Ifill '77, '93HD. “I told her about our connection to Simmons. ... She lit up, and was just lovely,” Soler recalls. “It was a time that I still hold close to my heart.”

In 1995, Soler received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Simmons University Alumnae/i Association. In 2006, Simmons awarded her with an Honorary Doctorate.

Ultimately, Soler is a great believer in taking risks. “I think that risk-taking is one of the central tenets of leadership. ... Never be afraid to put yourself in difficult situations; don’t go narrow, go wide.”

BUILT FOR MENTORSHIP.

NOW

A Bridge to Belonging

The Dotson Bridge and Mentoring Program utilizes equity and belonging as its guiding principles.

By *Kathryn Dickason*

“In my view, mentorship is reaching one hand back as you step forward,” says Sasha DuBois ’08BSN, Nurse Director at Spaulding Rehabilitation of Mass General Brigham.

Since its inception in 2009, DuBois has served as a Mentor for Simmons’ Dotson Bridge and Mentoring Program, and was instrumental in its formation. This customized program pairs first-generation and ALANA (African American, Latinx, Asian, and Native American) nursing student mentees—called Scholars—with experienced Mentors (typically School of Nursing alumnae/i) to address the barriers underserved populations often face. Reverend Dr. Gloria Harris Cater served as the program’s first director, and in 2010, Associate Professor of Practice LaDonna Christian ’12C, ’16PhD assumed the role of director.

Dean (now Emerita) Judy Beal helped secure inaugural funding from Phyllis Nickerson Dotson ’62 and George S. Dotson. In a 2024 interview filmed for the annual Dotson Gala, Ms. Dotson said, “George and I have always felt that we want to help anyone who has a burden or may be underserved.”

Dotson Scholar Mahathi Kosaraju ’27 has developed an enriching relationship with her Mentor, Saby [Jean-Pierre] Volmar ’12, a Critical Care Nurse Practitioner at Tufts Medical Center. “Saby is ... honest and open,” says Kosaraju. “Dotson Mentors see us as humans first, then nursing students.”

Beyond Mentor-Scholar exchanges, the Dotson program offers academic and communal resources, including individualized tutoring, the Dotson Room (a study space for participants), and events featuring guest speakers from the nursing profession.

Equity and belonging are guiding principles undergirding the program’s design and success. Scholar Hayden Lee ’24, a mentee of Professor Christian who completed her BSN program in December 2024, comes from a long line of Chinese-American woman nurses. As Lee observes, “There are not many nurses of Asian descent in New England.”

Noticing that Lee struggled in one of her courses, Professor Christian coached her on time management, career goals, and nursing exam preparation. “Seeing Hayden walk into my office with a smile on her face is the reason I keep doing this DEI work,” Christian reflects.

For Lee, mentorship “gives you accountability and helps you make sure that you are on the right track. ... Receiving wisdom from other BIPOC nurses who have already gone through the process is so helpful,” she says. “I meet with Professor Christian frequently and we talk about everything under the sun.”

Born in India, Kosaraju is aware of the cultural stereotype regarding educated Indians becoming doctors. “I love science, but I prefer the patient-centered care that nurses provide,” she explains. The only aspiring nurse in her family, Kosaraju realized that she needed personalized guidance—the Dotson program was the ideal solution.

These mentorships also prepare students to navigate hidden inequities within health care. “Racialized medicine is real,” notes DuBois.

Theorizing this issue further, Cater derives inspiration from a civil rights icon: “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, ‘Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.’ ...

One way to mitigate this injustice and inequality is to make sure that RNs of color are represented at all levels and in all types of health care facilities.” The Dotson program helps address this problem.

As a result of this program, “We have amazing outcomes [e.g., increased NCLEX

“The Dotson program is great, and other schools should emulate it. ... And in the future, I would be happy to pay it forward as a Dotson Mentor.”

Hayden Lee ’24,
Mentee of Associate Professor of Practice
LaDonna Christian ’16PhD

exam and Simmons course pass rates and improved attrition rates], and our students have a place to belong,” DuBois says.

The intergenerational, inter-experiential community that constitutes the Dotson program mirrors many ALANA cultures. Belonging to a large family with Haitian and Bermudian ancestry, DuBois says, “We are very centered around community.” As she once explained to Beal, “I have younger people looking up to me, and I have family [elders] waiting for me to excel. ... Essentially, this degree is not just my own.”

In Lee’s words, “The Dotson program is great, and other schools should emulate it. ... And in the future, I would be happy to pay it forward as a Dotson Mentor.”





Associate Professor of Practice
LaDonna Christian '16PHD
with mentee Hayden Lee '24

THEN

A Legendary Mentor

Professor Emeritus Alden W. Poole P'78 (1925–2015) “prided himself in being a good adviser and spending a lot of time with his students,” his daughter, Lucy Burlingame '80, '83MA, told *The Simmons Voice* in 2018.

Poole, who served as a faculty member and later chair of Simmons' Department of Communications from 1955 to 1986, was an experienced newspaper reporter and editor. In 1972, he became Executive Editor of *The Boston Herald*. At Simmons, Poole taught journalism. His pedagogy bridged academic learning with real-world skills, attuning students to the demands of the newsroom.



Professor Emeritus
Alden W. Poole

Outside the classroom, he was also known for his commitment to social activism. For generations of alumnae/i, Poole was a beloved educator and formative mentor.

Many of Poole's former students went on to establish admirable careers in the media, journalism, arts, and entertainment. A few luminaries include film producer Denise Di Novi '77, '97HD; NBC Chief Education Correspondent Rehema

Ellis '74, '00HD; and WBUR's *All Things Considered* Host Lisa Mullins '80, '05HD.

Perhaps his most well-known mentee was Gwen Ifill '77, '93HD (1955–2016). She credited Poole for helping her land her first journalism job with *The Boston Herald* in 1977, and for providing encouragement well beyond graduation. In a birthday card to Poole, Ifill wrote: “The lessons you taught me at Simmons still endure. I am honored to be one of your journalistic offspring.”



NOW

Defying Gravity

Gregory Maguire '78MA writes for and about children... *Wicked* and otherwise.
By Alisa M. Libby

"My degree at Simmons, and the people I met at Simmons, were absolutely and completely influential in building up my confidence, my courage, and my sense of moral vision as I led into writing *Wicked*," says Gregory Maguire '78MA, reflecting on the path to writing his best-selling novel, published in 1995.

Maguire was among the first graduates of the Master of Arts in Children's Literature program at Simmons, now celebrating its 50th anniversary. One of the influential people he met during his studies was Betty Levin (1927–2022), a professor and founding faculty of the Center for the Study of Children's Literature at Simmons, whom he describes as, "a flinty, unsentimental New Englander." Their friendship began when he was a student, and continued through the nine years he taught in the program.

Levin's guidance proved especially pivotal when ReganBooks offered to publish Maguire's first adult novel, *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*. A reimagining of L. Frank Baum's 1900 novel, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Maguire's novel focuses on Elphaba, a green-skinned girl who would grow up to become the titular witch.

"My editor said, 'We're going to publish it, but you need to lose 5-8% of it, it's just too long,'" says Maguire. At the time, he was staying with Levin in her farmhouse in Lincoln, Massachusetts, while speaking at schools across New England. "Betty said, 'Don't worry, we'll do it.' And we sat down with the manuscript of over 500 pages and we went through it page by page."

When the book was published in 1995, Maguire dedicated it to Levin. "Without her wisdom as a professor, a canny reader, an editor, and a writer herself, I wouldn't have had access to the skill set that she had. I had a lot of imagination and a fluidity with language. ... but I didn't know how to

be restrained—some would say I still don't! She knew how to cut out the malarkey."

Upon its publication, *Wicked* was widely praised; *Kirkus Reviews* called it "A captivating, funny, and perceptive look at destiny, personal responsibility, and the not-always-clashing beliefs of faith and magic." It landed on national best-seller lists in 1995, and was the inspiration for the Broadway musical that debuted in 2003. It was also the first novel in Maguire's *The Wicked Years* series, followed by three other novels centered on his re-imagining of the Land of Oz.

More recently, Maguire has returned to children's literature with his middle-grade fantasy *Cress Watercress* (Candlewick Press, 2022). Maguire notes that those outside of the field can be dismissive of literature for children, but the Simmons program fully embraces its value. "Children's literature has a very specific job to do, and

"Children's literature has a very specific job to do, and when it does it well, it changes lives. This is what Simmons taught me."

Gregory Maguire '78MA

when it does it well, it changes lives. This is what Simmons taught me." In Maguire's view, children's literature requires greater skill than writing for adults. "Children have no patience with a piece of art that isn't functioning now," he says. "They will not wait three pages to see if it gets any better. They throw it on the floor and they go back to their video games."

Before *Wicked* came to the big screen in 2024, Maguire returned to some of the material he and Levin had discarded from his original draft.

"One of the things we took out was about the life of Elphaba, who would become the Wicked Witch of the West, between the ages of 3 and 16. Who somebody is at the age of 7 and 11 and 14 is absolutely crucial to understanding how they got to be the person we begin to recognize."

Maguire's forthcoming book, *Elphie: A Wicked Childhood* (William Morrow, March 2025) gives him the opportunity to fill in those gaps. "The truth is that I still care about Elphaba. She's a person with individuality and with vitality still. She is part of me. I can still look at her and think, 'I'm not quite sure how you operate, I know I never will, but there are still things to examine.'"

THEN



Bertha E. Mahony,
Class of 1906

Blowing the Horn

In October of 1924, the first issue of *The Horn Book* magazine appeared. It began as a newsletter from the Bookshop for Boys and Girls, one of the first children's book shops in the United States, established in 1916 by the Women's Educational and Industrial Union. Bertha E. Mahony (later Bertha Mahony Miller), who graduated from Simmons School of Secretarial Studies in 1906, helmed both the shop and the magazine.

In her first editorial, Mahony explained the purpose of the publication: "First of all, however, we are publishing this sheet to blow the horn for fine books for boys and girls—their authors, their illustrators, and their publishers. Small and inconspicuous space in the welter of present-day printing is given to the description and criticism of these books, and yet the finest type of writing, illustrating, and printing goes into them." Mahony's legacy continues: *The Horn Book* magazine has generated reviews, opinions, granted awards, and garnered well-deserved attention to the best books for children over the past 100 years.

NOW

Advocating for Others

A School of Social Work alumna embraces change as a professional and volunteer. *By Robert Dunn*

Anne Villano '22MSW says her decision to enroll in Simmons' School of Social Work was influenced by factors that also shaped the volunteer service she engaged in while earning her degree—and her path since graduating: life experience and an affinity for advocacy.

"I decided to make a career change from graphic design to social work based on my experience in the military as the spouse of an active-duty officer," says Villano, noting that her efforts to navigate the military's mental health care system proved frustrating—and motivating.

"I recognized that social work offers so many avenues to advocate for and touch so many different populations. That advocacy piece has always been part of who I am," says Villano. She chose Simmons because it was the first institution of higher learning to offer training for clinical social workers, and its online program was perfect for someone in a military family subject to frequent moves.

What Villano learned advocating for herself led to advocacy on behalf of others in military life. Along the way, she drew on what she was learning at Simmons and her background as an artist. She developed creative therapies, and she collaborated to bring to the United States an international art therapy program for refugees called Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow. In 2022, the Armed Forces Insurance Program honored Villano for her work.

During her last semester, Villano's life and professional path took another turn when her family relocated to Cape Cod so she could care for her parents. Her mom and dad both spent their final months in hospice following battles with cancer. The experience motivated Villano to seek work in hospice after earning her Simmons degree.

"I just clicked with the people working in hospice, and I was hired on the spot. I attribute that to not just my personal experience, but to the confidence level I have because of my Simmons education," says Villano.

As Villano's husband prepared to transition from active military duty to the reserves, they moved to Colorado Springs last November. Within weeks, Villano's social work career took another turn when she became a primary therapist at a 30-day residential recovery center for people dealing with substance use and related mental health challenges.

"I just clicked with the people working in hospice, and I was hired on the spot. I attribute that to not just my personal experience, but to the confidence level I have because of my Simmons education."

Anne Villano '22MSW

"My four brothers struggled with substance use my whole life, and I lost one brother to an OD suicide," says Villano. "I never thought I would want to, or more importantly, be able to assist people in this high level of care for substance use." But she sees the work as an opportunity "to cultivate empathy towards this population" and in a way, to honor her late brother.

"I believe the crux of a lot of substance use struggles people have is because of mental health challenges. The center honors that interplay. It's more of a whole-person, humanistic approach which I think is where the field and this population is finally starting to head," says Villano. "And the center is very open to me creating some kind of art class or art therapy within my group and individual work."

In addition to "giving back" to and through her profession, Villano anticipates volunteer service to her new community after learning more about it. Right now, she's focused on the needs of her children, 9 and 7.

"We get into social work to help people. You feel like a superhero one day and an imposter the next. Ultimately, you need to keep your own house in order, internally, and honor those limits. Otherwise, you're going to dim what you bring to your community. There's no shame in taking a pause to really assess your situation," says Villano.

THEN

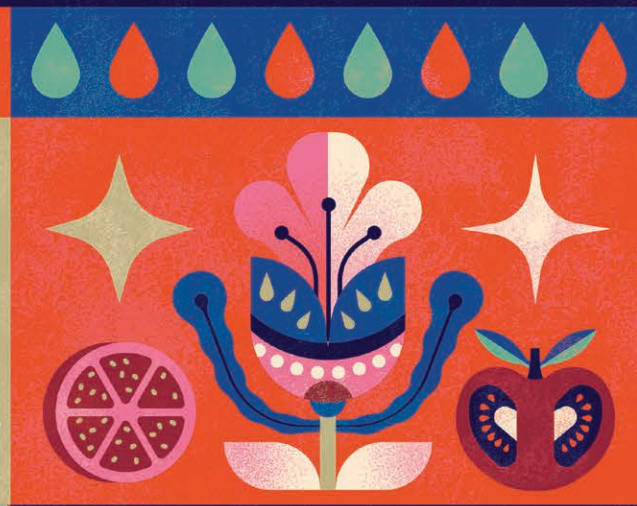
The Giver Who Kept on Giving

Over her decades-long association with Simmons University, the late Florence "Peggy" Adelson Saslow '44, P'73, P'76 epitomized what it means to be an active, engaged, and generous alumna. A perennial presence at Reunion, Saslow "gave back" as a volunteer and donor. She served on the Simmons Alumnae/i Executive Board and as president of the Simmons College



Florence "Peggy" Adelson Saslow '44, P'73, P'76

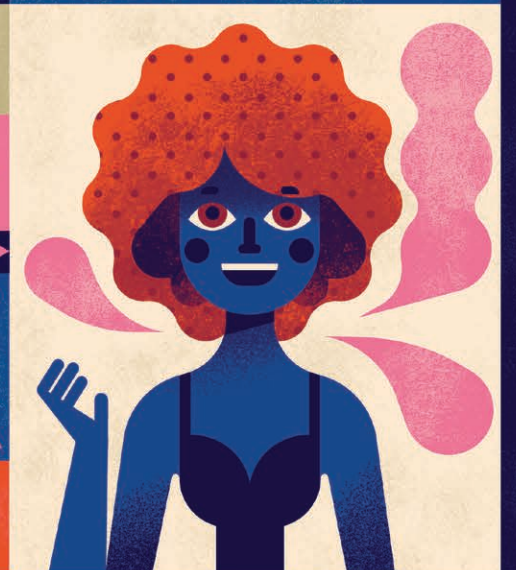
Club of New Jersey, made gifts to Simmons over 50 consecutive years, and encouraged others to establish planned gifts as she had. Simmons honored Saslow's gifts of time, talent, testimony, treasure, and ties, with the Mary Logan Canavan Planned Giving Award and the Alumnae Service Award. Her Simmons legacy includes two daughters and a granddaughter who are alumnae: Susan Saslow '73; Judy Saslow Bounan '76, P'03; and Shana Saslow Engel '03.



BUILT



**FOR
GIVING
BACK**



THROUGH THE LENS

125

CELEBRATING
125 YEARS
OF SIMMONS

We looked back at the past 125 years and pulled together the best images taken through the eyes and lenses of the Simmons community—highlighting learning, campus, student life, and our beloved mascot, Stormy the Shark.

PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED BY THE SIMMONS UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

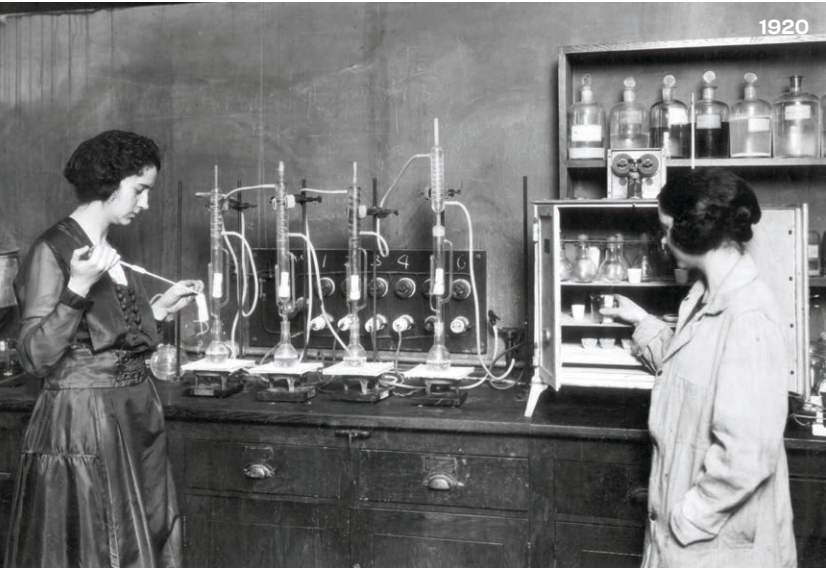
KELSEY KOLBET
Archivist and Digital Initiatives Librarian

ZOE JOHNSON
Archives and Digital Initiatives Fellow

HANNAH GERSHONE
Archives and Digital Initiatives Fellow







1920



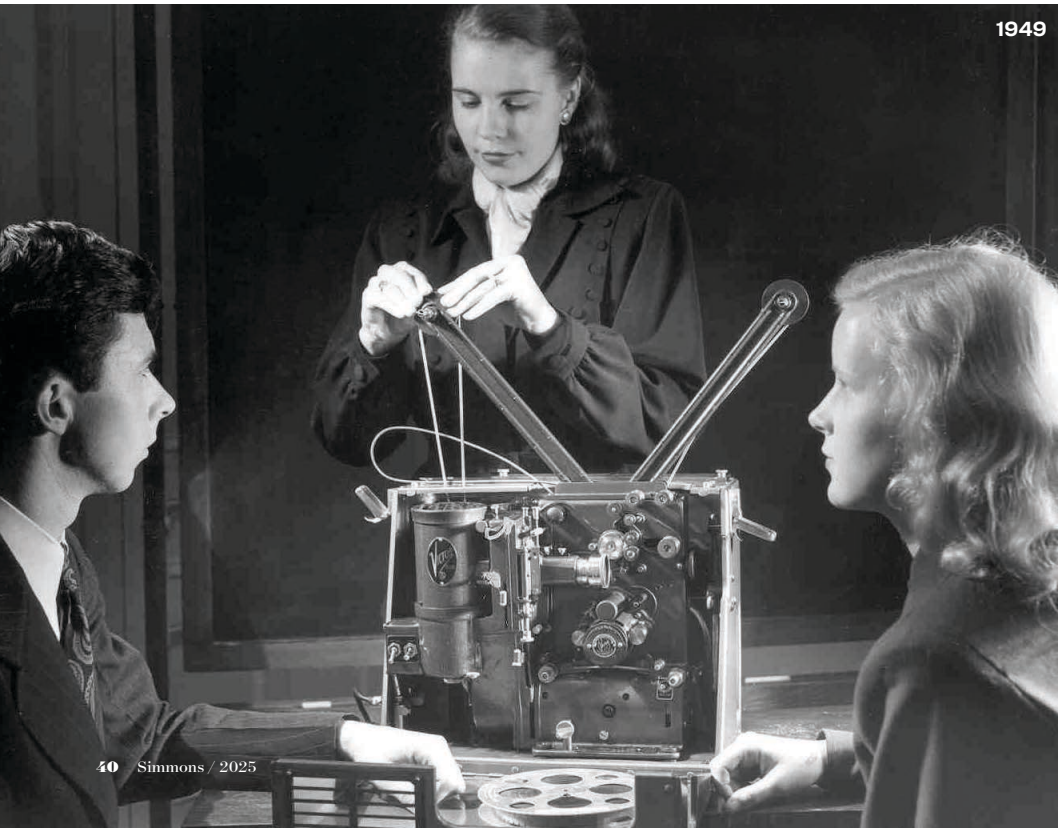
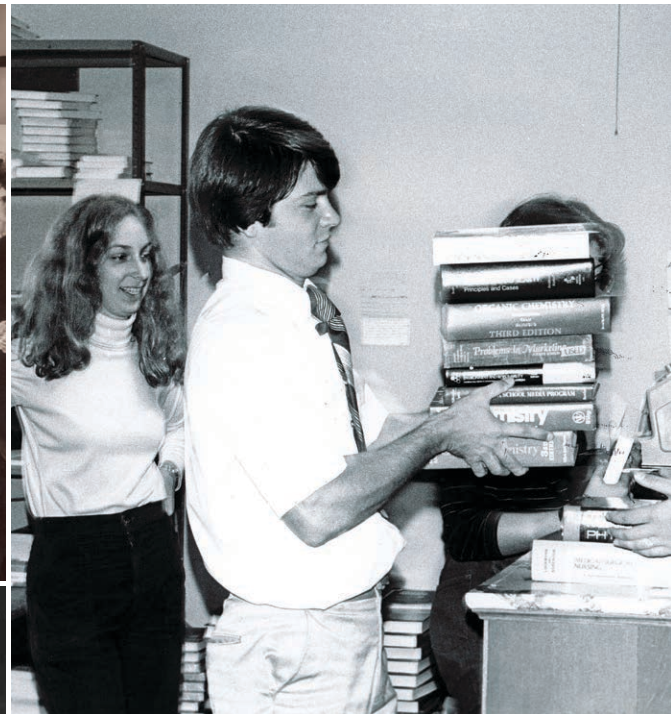
1954



2006



1920



1949

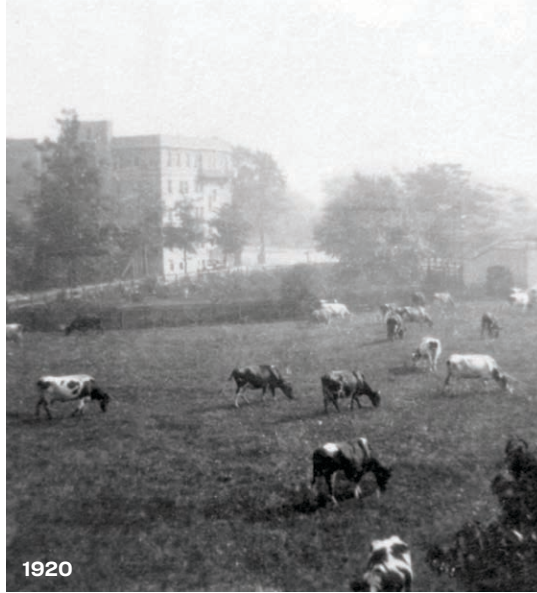
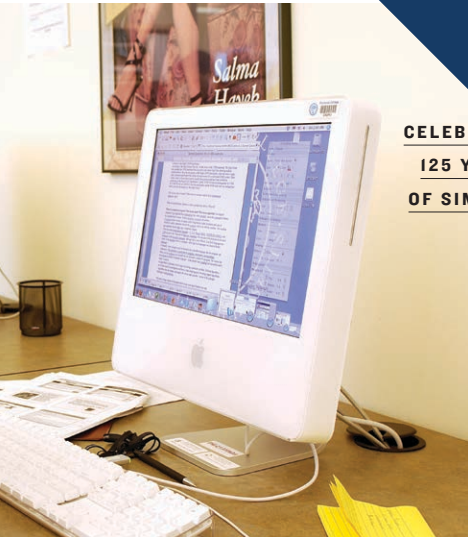


2024

LEARNING

125

**CELEBRATING
125 YEARS
OF SIMMONS**



1920



1956



1979



1945

CAMPUS



1990



2024



1958



c. 1990



Stormy the Shark

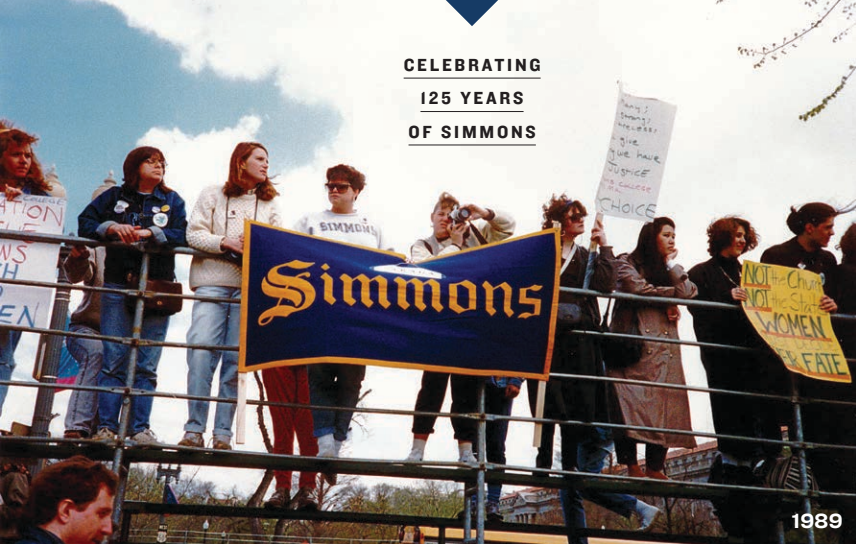
The shark mascot for Simmons began with the field hockey team. Finding themselves without a mascot, they started calling themselves the Simmons Sharks. Senior co-captain Priscilla Kelley '93 explained, "Venessa [van Aalst '93, co-captain] called me 'shark breath' one day at practice, so I gave her a shark bite." Soon the team had an inflatable shark as its new mascot, and the name has stuck ever since. The shark was officially chosen as Simmons' mascot in either late 1992 or 1993, but it did not receive the now iconic "Stormy" name until March 2011 as part of "Shark Week," sponsored by the Office of Student Leadership and Activities. How the name came to be is unrecorded, but if rumor is to be believed, the name may have stemmed from the fact that the woman who wore the shark suit was named Storm.

A big thank you to the Simmons University Archives and their amazing staff, without whom this issue would not have been possible. Check out more historical Simmons images at simmons.access.preservica.com.



125

CELEBRATING
125 YEARS
OF SIMMONS



1989



1980



2023



STUDENT LIFE



1921



1948



2024



FROM LEADING THE CHARGE TO LEADING THE CHANGE YOU BELONG HERE



SIMMONS LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE 2025

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A virtual learning journey designed to accelerate careers and drive impact.



Etc.

ALUMNAE/1 & FRIENDS • UPDATES & EVENTS • ADVANCING SIMMONS



Meet the Deans

A Q+A with the deans of Simmons' six schools.
Pg. 46

From left, Dr. Paul Geisler, Dr. Michael LaSala, Dr. Astrid Sheil, Dr. Ammina Kothari, Dr. Heather Shlosser, and Dr. Sanda Erdelez.



The Simmons Six

A conversation with the academic leaders of our six schools. *By Laura Wareck*

Last year, Simmons launched a six-school academic structure that is elevating the institution's long-standing leadership in critical fields. Along with

these new schools, we welcomed a vibrant cohort of deans, whose expertise is helping to leverage the signature strengths of each school.

Dr. Sanda Erdelez is Dean of the School of Library and Information Science. Dr. Paul Geisler leads the new School of Sciences and Health Professions. Dr. Ammina Kothari is Dean of the Gwen Ifill School of Media, Humanities, and Social Sciences. Dr. Michael

LaSala leads the School of Social Work. Dr. Astrid Sheil is Dean of the School of Management, and Dr. Heather Shlosser is Dean of the School of Nursing.

Simmons Magazine recently sat down with the deans to learn more about their experiences at Simmons.

What do you enjoy most about Simmons?

Erdelez: I enjoy the close-knit and collaborative nature of the Simmons community, where relationships are easily formed and ideas flow freely across disciplines. The campus is a welcoming, accessible space that fosters engagement and a sense of belonging.

LaSala: Its relatively small, intimate size and friendly, relational nature. I also love the diversity of the student population. Several faculty and staff have told me there is a Simmons Magic, and I certainly feel it!

Sheil: Simmons is an amazingly welcoming community. From the moment you step onto campus, you can feel the energy. People really care about this place and each other.

What is energizing about your role?

Geisler: The small success stories: helping someone achieve their goals, finding solutions, and having productive conversations that reinforce the



◀ Clockwise from top left, Dr. Sanda Erdelez, Dr. Astrid Sheil, Dr. Michael LaSala, Dr. Ammina Kothari, Dr. Paul Geisler, and Dr. Heather Shlosser.

notion that we are all in this together, working towards the same goals in alignment with the Simmons Vision.

Kothari: The opportunity to work with my colleagues to foster critical thinking and empower students to engage deeply with the world around them, preparing them to thrive in a knowledge-based economy. We teach students to understand complex social issues, ask difficult questions, and become informed and compassionate leaders.

Shlosser: Witnessing the passion and ingenuity of our students as they answer the call to nursing, advanced practice, and nursing leadership. The focus on leadership and advocacy empowers our students to become change-makers in health care, and being part of their journey is inspiring and fulfilling.

Can you share a unique fact about your school?

Erdelez: The School of Library and Information Science is the only LIS school in the US that shares its founding with its parent institution. Simmons awarded its first 12 library science graduate degrees in 1904, predating its first undergraduate bachelor's degrees.



Geisler: I would bet that we are the only school of our size in the country that has ongoing STEM-focused grant programs from NASA and the Henry Luce Foundation!

Kothari: We are the only school in the US named after Gwen Ifill '77, '93HD.

LaSala: While the University is celebrating its 125th anniversary, the School of Social Work is celebrating its 120th, making it the oldest school of clinical social work in the nation.

Sheil: School of Management alumnae are very accomplished! I look forward to soliciting their input and support in developing the future direction of the School.

Shlosser: Our commitment to integrating

advanced technology and innovative teaching methods into our curriculum is unique. We're continually expanding our simulation center and clinical partnerships to provide students with hands-on, real-world experiences.

What is your favorite campus spot?

Kothari: The hallway outside my office, where the inspiring words of Gwen Ifill remind me daily of our mission and shared vision.

LaSala: I have two. The cupola on top of the Main College Building, for its beauty and history, and the tower under construction, which represents the future.

Shlosser: My favorite spots are a tie be-

tween the University Library and the School of Nursing simulation center. The library is a treasure trove of knowledge and a peaceful haven for study and reflection. On the other hand, the simulation center is a dynamic hub of innovation where nursing students gain invaluable hands-on experience.

What is one question you'd ask John Simmons?

Erdelez: If I could meet John Simmons, I'd put him in a time machine and introduce him to our current students. I'd love to ask him if they embody the values and ideals he envisioned when founding this institution.

Geisler: What was it, exactly, that inspired you to dedicate your estate and name towards the betterment of women?

Sheil: I don't have a question, but I'd like to thank him for his prescient understanding of the importance of educating women to be financially independent.

What is a fun fact people don't know about you?

Erdelez: I enjoy challenging myself with new skills, like juggling and calligraphy, because they

push me out of my comfort zone and help me develop patience and focus.

Geisler: As part of the golf performance and fitness world, I played golf with NBA players Charles Barkley and Grant Hill, former Pistons Coach Chuck Daly, and a variety of golf and tennis pros. I was also the keynote speaker for the 2002 Swedish Golf Federation Medical Conference.

Kothari: I've visited over 23 countries and have climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, which gave me a new perspective on perseverance.

LaSala: I exercise six days per week. You might find me running across the street from Simmons in the Emerald Necklace park. Don't be alarmed if I shout out a hello as I pass by!

Sheil: I love to play Puerto Rican Danza [ballroom dance] on the piano.

Shlosser: I can often be found lost in a sea of books, always on the hunt for my next literary adventure. My love for reading is endless, and I'm constantly expanding my ever-growing collection.

To read an extended version of this story, see simmons.edu/go/125magazine.



“We want to continue providing support for students who want an education but are struggling with that goal from a financial perspective.”

◀ Denise Coll '95MBA



IMPACT

The Gift of Scholarship

Denise Coll '95MBA helps nursing students achieve their goals. *By Robert Dunn*

Simmons University

Trustee Denise Coll '95MBA credits her School of Management education with making a real difference in the success she had professionally in the hospitality industry. "And for that, I really wanted to give back. I hope other people will have the opportunity to experience what I did," says Coll.

To help current and future students pursue a Simmons education, Coll and her husband, Nicholas Sampson, established a scholarship at the University in 2023, and they named it in honor of Coll's mother. The Irene Tobin Coll, RN Endowed Scholarship Fund (and a companion current-use scholarship fund in her name) provide financial assistance for students enrolled in Simmons' undergraduate nursing programs.

"We saw our gift as a wonderful opportunity for us to both recognize my mother and connect her to Simmons' School of Nursing which is, obviously, one of the top nursing

programs in the country" says Coll. "Making that connection made this a really special gift for us." Coll's mother earned her RN degree in 1947 through the Cadet Nurse Corps, which was established in 1943 to address a shortage of nurses before and during World War II.

As for her own professional path, Coll was mid-career in the hospitality field and working for the ITT Sheraton Corporation when she decided to pursue an MBA. The program Simmons offered at the time appealed to her for several reasons. She liked the option of pursuing her degree part-time, and the prospect of learning with other students who, as she did, "came to the classroom with actual work experience," says Coll. "The fact that it was an all-women's program was a bonus for me."

Coll knows firsthand the significance of financial help with tuition. Her employer at the time, ITT Sheraton, paid 75 percent of the cost of her graduate education. "It



▲
Adelsa Brandao Andrade '25
and Anabelle Cai '26

would have been really difficult for me to try to take the whole load. Thanks to their support, I was able to graduate debt free. I was very grateful."

Coll and her husband share a commitment to supporting education philanthropically. "I'm very focused on, and concerned about the cost of education today," says Coll. "We want to continue providing support for students who want

an education but are struggling with that goal from a financial perspective." This year, the scholarship funds named for Coll's mother were awarded to five undergraduates: Adelsa Brandao Andrade '25, Charisse Bretoux '26, Ella Brucato '26, Anabelle Cai '26, and Jiecy Chen '24.

In a letter to Coll and Sampson, Chen, a BSN student, wrote, "Attending Simmons and pursuing a career

in health care has been my longstanding dream. With the help of this scholarship for my education, I will be able to work towards my goals and become a compassionate and skilled nurse. My main objective is to make a positive difference in the lives of others through my work. Thank you very much for your contribution and generosity in supporting my education and goals!"



TRADITIONS

Rooted in Tradition, Growing with Time

The student traditions that have defined campus life for generations—blending history, community, and celebration. *By Mack MacKenzie*

Simmons traditions have played a significant role in the student experience over the past 125 years—serving as a way to build community and providing opportunities for social engagement and connection to previous generations. While traditions have evolved over the years, their goal of bringing the Simmons community together to experience memorable, magical moments remains unchanged.



Class Day

Class Day was first celebrated in 1908 and was one of the last social events of the school year. It had a variety of events dedicated to celebrating the seniors, including the Ivy Exercises, the Class Day Dance, and step singing. One of the most picturesque moments from Class Day was the Daisy Chain Procession. The junior class would make lengthy daisy chains for the graduating seniors to hold outside South Hall as they continued step singing. Now, we celebrate our graduating seniors with Senior Week. Planned by the Senior Class Council, the week typically includes a Commencement ball, candle lighting, and a senior awards ceremony.



May Day

Simmons celebrated the first May Day in 1912, and it is the University's longest-running tradition. The sophomore class organized the day's festivities. They began the day by hanging May Baskets on seniors' doors and then went through the dorm hallways singing in hopes of waking the seniors. The senior class president was crowned the Queen of May, and sophomores danced around a Maypole. May Day is still celebrated each spring; the Sophomore Class Council plans the festivities with an emphasis on bringing the Simmons community closer together and student organizations such as the Simmons Chamber Choir, the Sirens a capella group, and the Simmons University Dance Company perform during the day.



Olde English Dinner

The first Olde English Dinner was held in December 1914. Alumnae Hall, then the Refectory, was decorated with wreaths and candlelight. Students, faculty, and staff would dress up in medieval costumes. As part of the tradition, students ate a roast pig and flaming Christmas pudding using only knives. A modern incarnation of this tradition is the Winter Wonderland, where the first-year class council plans a feast at Bartol Hall for all students to enjoy. Winter Wonderland has a special event menu and is decorated to match whatever theme the class council has selected. Some past themes include log cabin, winter at Hogwarts, ski lodge, and enchanted forest.



Senior/Faculty Dinner

The Senior/Faculty Dinner was originally held as part of Class Day as a way to celebrate the seniors. It was a chance for students to spend time with their favorite faculty members and reminisce about their time at Simmons before they graduated. Over the years, this tradition of celebrating seniors has taken the form of luncheons, receptions, and most recently, awards dinners. The senior awards dinner happens during Senior Week, and it's a chance for seniors to be recognized for their accomplishments at Simmons by their peers and professors. After the awards ceremony, everyone gathers in the Main College Building to enjoy dinner and socialize.



Candle Lighting Ceremony

A more recent tradition is the Candle Lighting Ceremony. Started in 2015, the ceremony is the final event of fall orientation for new students. Simmons' president, dean of students, and alumnae/i leadership give speeches welcoming the incoming class on the Residence Campus quad. New students help each other light their candles as they build friendships. Candle lighting is also the last event of Senior Week, held before Commencement and offers a full circle moment to remind seniors how much they've grown since their first candle-lighting ceremony.



Challenging the Process

Entrepreneur Dianne Savastano '99MBA founds Healthassist. *By Laura Wareck*

Dianne Savastano '99MBA has combined her experience in health care with her MBA to launch *Healthassist*, a Massachusetts-based company that helps people navigate the complexities of the health care and health insurance systems.

"I value every single career experience I've ever had because I've built upon all of them in *Healthassist*," says Savastano. "When I'm talking to young people, I always say, 'you know, your career is not necessarily linear.'"

In Savastano's case, initial leadership experiences as a registered nurse led to opportunities as a hospital, insurance, and employee benefits executive, and as a management consultant.

At a turning point in her career, Savastano

attended the Simmons Leadership Conference. The camaraderie and enthusiasm she witnessed among School of Management (SOM) alumnae/i sparked her interest in Simmons.

"I was blown away by the conference," she says. "The culture there really impressed me. I was watching alumni reconnecting and sharing stories and I thought, 'I want that.'"

She ultimately enrolled in the intensive one-year MBA program offered at the time. "I don't think I would be where I am today had I not had that Simmons experience. It helped me pull all of my experiences together and lead me to a place where I'm utilizing all of my skills," says Savastano.

"The work was hard. It was intense, and it was life-changing. ... I learned so much from my classmates and the experience was very affirming in many ways."

After graduating from Simmons, Savastano's concept for her future company continued to evolve. She identified an unmet

"The work was hard. It was intense, and it was life-changing."

▶
Dianne Savastano '99MBA





need among people who sought help navigating the health care system. Knowing she needed a business plan, she took another class with the SOM to develop one. The result was the foundation for *Healthassist*, which focuses on two critical service areas: helping clients with complex medical conditions manage and coordinate their care and ensuring individuals can understand and choose the right health insurance plan for their needs.

Savastano appreciates how Simmons believes that leadership skills can be learned.

"I still use these leadership practices," she says. "I've taught them to my team. One of those practices is 'challenge the process.' We challenge the health care process every day at *Healthassist*."

Savastano also believes in giving back to the Simmons community, whether it's volunteering for the Simmons Leadership Conference, serving as a connection point with other alumnae/i, or mentoring current students. She's also looking forward to a bright future for the newly relaunched SOM.

"I can't tell you how excited I am," she says.



▲
Libby Lassiter '24

From Start to Finish

Libby Lassiter '24 returns to college with Simmons' online degree completion program.

A flexible and student-centered environment were two reasons why Libby Lassiter '24 chose Simmons' online degree completion program, which helps adult learners achieve their goal of graduating from college.

"It was a great experience," Lassiter says. "If I had my [Simmons] advisor when I was 19, I would have finished college."

Medical issues during Lassiter's sophomore year at the University of Georgia forced her out of school. Although she tried to

return several times over the years, it was difficult to balance classes and work. College was always in the back of her mind, even as she built a highly successful real-estate career.

When the pandemic hit, Lassiter seized the opportunity to finally earn her degree.

"I love that you can do the program from anywhere," she says. "I couldn't have participated if that wasn't the case, because there was no way I could have attended classes in person with my job."

Simmons' commit-

ment to social justice also resonated with Lassiter, who has worked as a community advocate and launched her own "Share the Mic" podcast featuring conversations among guests from diverse backgrounds.

Lassiter pursued a degree in general studies, which allowed her the flexibility to explore everything from global health to environmental studies. She wrote her first policy paper and used the experience to lobby in support of women's-related issues at the Alabama state legislature.

Lassiter graduated in May 2024 and participated in Commencement at the MGM Music Hall. "My whole family came, and it was wonderful," she says.

Today, Lassiter serves as a principal at the women-owned Tessa Commercial Real Estate company, working to preserve historic buildings. She also serves on several boards and continues to draw upon her experiences at Simmons.

"I got so much out of my program," she says. "I just loved it and have been able to share what I've learned with others."

—LAURA WARECK



**“I wouldn’t be where I am now without
the background knowledge that I gained from Simmons.”**

▲
Eryn Samuels Yong '12, at left, with her siblings, from left, Nathan Samuels '05MSN, '11DNP,
Ashley Samuels Shields '10, and Brittany Samuels Czerw '14

Built to Last

By Donna Hoke

LEGACY

All in the Family

The Samuels siblings—a Simmons School of Nursing tradition. *By Alisa M. Libby*

When Nathan Samuels '05MSN, '11DNP, now a Medical Director at Safety Optum Massachusetts, was first drawn to the field of nursing, he didn't anticipate his career would become a family tradition. Samuels graduated with his Master of Science in Nursing in 2005, then worked as a Nurse Practitioner while teaching at Simmons and completing the online Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program. By the time Samuels completed the program in 2011, studying nursing at Simmons had become a family affair. His sisters, Ashley Samuels Shields '10, Eryn Samuels Yong '12, and Brittany Samuels Czerw '14 followed in Nathan's footsteps.

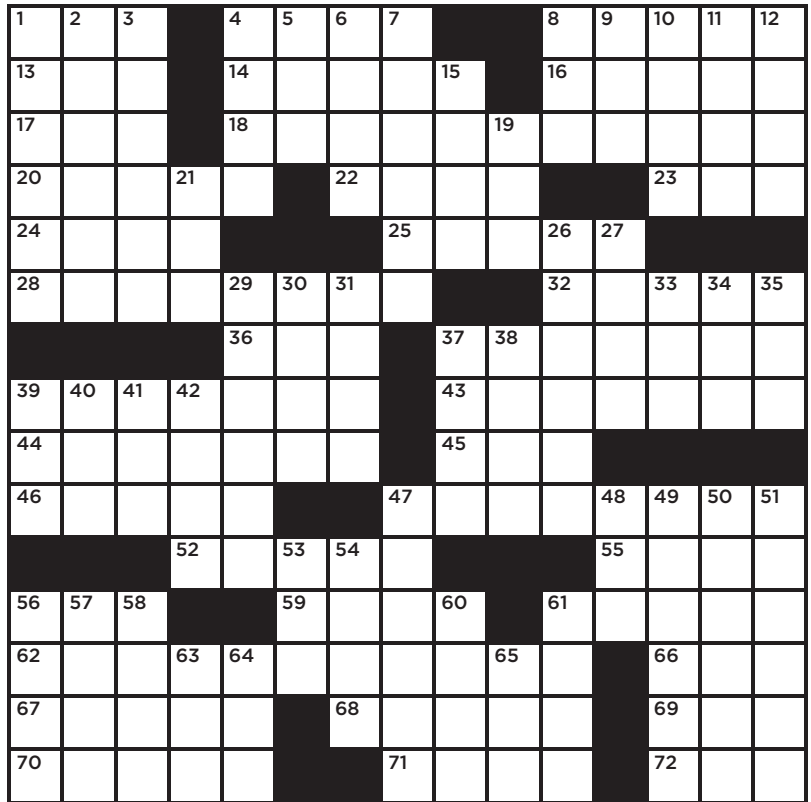
The siblings attribute their success to their time at Simmons. "The clinical placements were amazing," says Yong, who has worked in several care settings. "I wouldn't be where I am now without the background knowledge that I gained from Simmons. When I compare skills that I have to those of my colleagues, I can attribute those strong skills to my

Simmons education."

That Simmons advantage extends to other clinicians entering the field. "I have a team of social workers, and I can tell when they are from Simmons," says Shields. Samuels has also worked with Simmons graduates in his clinic, and just hired an NP Simmons graduate in his office. "There is a difference in the quality [of practice], right out of school," he says.

"What I love about the nursing field is that there are so many different areas to pursue, and your clinical experience will give you that exposure," says Samuels. "You don't need to commit to working with one population [throughout your career]. You can take the skills that you learned and bring them to new fields. Also, there are nurses everywhere: insurance, administration, quality assurance, research, overseeing clinical trials. There are so many opportunities outside of bedside nursing. It's hard to believe all that you can do with a nursing degree."

To read an extended version of this story, see simmons.edu/go/125magazine.



ACROSS

- 1. "31 Days of Oscar" cable channel, briefly
- 4. Acronym never used at Simmons
- 8. Simmons mascot
- 13. Moo ___ chicken
- 14. Certain *Caterpillar* creator
- 16. "Agreed!"
- 17. "A fool and ___ money..."
- 18. Way to mark an occasion, like a big anniversary
- 20. Brain freeze-causing drinks
- 22. Harvard ___
- 23. Gathering of RAs, say
- 24. Baba au ___ (alcoholic cake)
- 25. "Here's to Simmons' 125th!" e.g.
- 28. BUILT TO LAST
- 32. Word earned with a 3.75 GPA
- 36. "Bird" prefix
- 37. BUILT TO LAST
- 39. Founder's Day month
- 43. It might be early in heavy snow

44. BUILT TO LAST

- 45. It's got a point
- 46. December exam
- 47. BUILT TO LAST
- 52. "I won" hand gesture
- 55. Acronym popularized by Rachael Ray
- 56. Big inits. in credit reporting
- 59. What Trustman supports
- 61. Landmark sign
- 62. "Nobody's stopping us at Simmons now!"
- 66. Aussie boot
- 67. Alumna Gwen on a 2020 stamp
- 68. One field of study in the school named for 67 Across
- 69. *Family Circus* cartoonist Keane
- 70. "Arrive and Thrive," for example
- 71. Like some As
- 72. "Ethyl" or "benz" finish

DOWN

- 1. One might say "Simmons University Mom"
- 2. Affectedly elegant

- 3. 14 Across's eponymous Simmons partner
- 4. Averts a reply-all disaster
- 5. West of Hollywood
- 6. Paris airport
- 7. Shoes for soccer Sharks
- 8. 123-45-6789 org.
- 9. Trendy
- 10. Take ___ view of
- 11. One of many Simmons has in the community
- 12. "I Have a Dream" speechmaker
- 15. *Hills Like White Elephants* river
- 19. "% Daily Value" precursor
- 21. 13th Spanish letter
- 26. Either of two Hulu characters
- 27. Zap
- 29. They might go on folders
- 30. Before times
- 31. "Dear" gentlemen
- 33. Big name in cookies sold in spring; abbr.
- 34. Grafton's ___ for *Noose*

- 35. Do great on a quiz
- 37. Berry prefix
- 38. Apt rhyme for "crude" and "rude"
- 39. Clumsy person
- 40. "Creator" of many aliens, briefly
- 41. Number for Simmons' next president
- 42. "___ Trygvason" (Grieg cantata)
- 47. Pizza or sushi for students, often
- 48. Backpacker's chain
- 49. Arm attachment, in an ER
- 50. "Think box"
- 51. Search for Simmons info, say
- 53. Bond author Fleming
- 54. A little weight
- 56. Annoying doofus
- 57. APR.-lowering option
- 58. Order of the court
- 60. It used to be a tonic in Boston
- 61. Aiken of *American Idol*
- 63. 90-degree bend
- 64. "Bravo matador!"
- 65. Fleur-de-___



Professor Bob White,
Department of Communications,
on meeting a cave painter
and giving away \$10 million.

➔ **What would you title your autobiography?** The title of my autobiography would be *Minuscule...Which You Know Means Little Small*.

When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up? When I was a child I wanted to be a real boy, like Pinocchio, or The Creature from The Black Lagoon.

What accomplishment are you most proud of? 1,700,000 copies were printed of my Education Life illustration for *The New York Times* in 1991.

What impresses you most about today's Simmons students? How they continue to deal with the results of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What advice would you give your 18-year-old self? Just because you love science fiction doesn't mean you can be a physicist. Change your major to English and do it quickly.

What's the best advice you've ever been given? A lover once said, "He's an artist" referring to me in the midst of a conversation. It was the first time I heard something like that. That advice translates into Know Thyself.

If you could take credit for any existing work of literature or art, what would it be? *Magic in the Mist* by Margaret Mary Kimmel, illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman.

What's the latest addition to your "bucket list"? Don't say "bucket" to an 80-year-old.

What's the most fascinating place you've ever been? I stood on the Acropolis in Athens under a full moon (and ancient ghosts stood with me).

Would you rather visit Simmons 125 years in the past or in the future? I would visit Simmons in the past when there was no internet.

What are your two favorite movies? *The City of Lost Children* and *Screamplay* (in which the character I play is murdered).

What's next on your must-read list? *Someone's Gonna End Up Crying* by Jo Knowles.

Which historical figure would you like to meet? I would like to meet the Lascaux Cave painter from 17,000 BC.

If someone gave you \$10 million, what philanthropic dream would you fulfill? Ten million doesn't do much nowadays, but I'd support research to wipe out disease.

What question would you ask John Simmons? "Hey, Johnny, wanna pass me that bottle?"



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